DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 460 274	CE 082 585
AUTHOR	Comings, John P.; Cuban, Sondra; Bos, Johannes M.; Taylor, Catherine J.
TITLE	"I Did It for Myself": Studying Efforts To Increase Adult Student Persistence in Library Literacy Programs.
INSTITUTION	National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, Boston, MA.; Manpower Demonstration Research Corp., New York, NY.
SPONS AGENCY	DeWitt Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund, Pleasantville, NY.; Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.; Ford Foundation, New York, NY.; Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Kansas City, MO.; Ambrose Monell Foundation, New York, NY.; Alcoa Foundation, Pittsburgh, PA.; George Gund Foundation, Cleveland, OH.; Grable Foundation, Pittsburgh, PA.; New York Times Foundation, NY.; Open Society Inst., New York, NY.
PUB DATE	2001-09-00
NOTE	95p.; Part of the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative. Dissertation also supported by Anheuser-Busch, Heinz Family, and Union Carbide Foundations.
AVAILABLE FROM	Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 16 East 34 Street, New York, NY 10016. Tel: 212-532-3200. For Union Carbide Foundations, full text on web site: http://www.mdrc.org.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Persistence; Adult Basic Education; Educational History; *Libraries; Library Role; *Literacy Education; *Program Design; Program Implementation; Qualitative Research; School Holding Power; Strategic Planning; Student Attrition

ABSTRACT

This report describes the design of the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) persistence study, the strategies that participating libraries are using to increase student persistence, and emerging implementation issues. It describes existing patterns in student persistence, identifies factors that support or inhibit persistence, and begins to explore the relationship between program strategies and persistence. Chapter 1, an introduction, is followed by Chapter 2 that discusses the context for the persistence study. It reviews relevant literature and discusses the history of library literacy programs. Chapter 3 presents the research design. Chapter 4 provides early findings from the initial qualitative research that suggest three categories of themes and their related strategies that are particularly important in explaining student persistence: programmatic (integrating the program into the library; respecting and caring for adult students; reflecting the core principles of libraries), instructional (curricula; assessment; technology; volunteer tutors), and student-based (disabilities; cultural and personal identity; sponsors; personal goals). Chapter 5 contains the case studies of the five library literacy programs in the persistence study, which are New York, Greensboro, Redwood City, and Queens Borough, and Oakland Public Libraries. Chapter 6 concludes the report by summarizing the importance of studying

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

persistence and the opportunities and challenges. The Appendix describes briefly 10 other library literacy programs that are part of the LILAA initiative but are not included in the persistence study. (YLB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 460 274

"I DID IT FOR MYSELF"

Studying Efforts to Increase Adult Student Persistence in Library Literacy Programs

John P. Comings
Sondra Cuban
Johannes M. Bos
Catherine J. Taylor

September 2001

MDRC

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. S. Greissman
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ROBERT SOLOW, *Chairman*
Institute Professor
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

RUDOLPH G. PENNER, *Treasurer*
Senior Fellow
Urban Institute

MARY JO BANE
Professor of Public Policy
John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University

REBECCA M. BLANK
Dean
Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy
University of Michigan

RON HASKINS
Senior Fellow
Brookings Institution

JAMES H. JOHNSON, JR.
E. Maynard Adams Professor of Business,
Geography, and Sociology
Director, Urban Investment Strategies Center
University of North Carolina

RICHARD J. MURNANE
Professor of Education
Graduate School of Education
Harvard University

MARION O. SANDLER
Chairman and CEO
Golden West Financial Corporation and
World Savings and Loan Association

ISABEL V. SAWHILL
Senior Fellow
Brookings Institution

LAWRENCE J. STUPSKI
Chairman
Stupski Family Foundation

WILLIAM JULIUS WILSON
Malcolm Wiener Professor of Social Policy
John F. Kennedy School of Government
Harvard University

JUDITH M. GUERON
President
Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation

MDRC

"I DID IT FOR MYSELF"

Studying Efforts to Increase Adult Student Persistence in Library Literacy Programs

John P. Comings
Sondra Cuban
Johannes M. Bos
Catherine J. Taylor

September 2001

MDRC

Manpower Demonstration
Research Corporation

The Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative is supported by the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds and, with the support also of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, is being evaluated by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL).

Dissemination of MDRC publications is also supported by the following foundations that help finance MDRC's public policy outreach and expanding efforts to communicate the results and implications of our work to policymakers, practitioners, and others: the Ford, Ewing Marion Kauffman, Ambrose Monell, Alcoa, George Gund, Grable, Anheuser-Busch, New York Times Company, Heinz Family, and Union Carbide Foundations; and the Open Society Institute.

The findings and conclusions in this document do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

For information about MDRC and copies of our publications, see our Web site: www.mdrc.org.
MDRC© is a registered trademark of the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

Copyright © 2001 by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

Overview

Learning to read and write is a serious challenge for adult students, many of whom enter literacy programs with low skills, special learning needs, or negative past experiences in school. Adult responsibilities make it especially challenging for these students to persist in a literacy program long enough to make meaningful progress toward reaching their literacy goals.

Launched in 1999 and funded by the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds, the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative is aimed at helping literacy programs at public libraries across the country implement strategies to improve persistence among adult students. These strategies aim to make program attendance easier by offering child care, transportation, and expanded hours of operation. Instructional priorities include making program instruction more engaging and relevant by adapting curricula (often designed for children) to adult interests and needs, improving teacher and tutor training, and identifying potential barriers to persistence at program entry.

As part of the LILAA initiative, in 2000 MDRC and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) began a three-year study of the implementation and effectiveness of strategies to increase student persistence in the adult literacy programs of five public libraries: Redwood City Public Library and Oakland Public Library in California, New York Public Library and Queens Borough Public Library in New York City, and Greensboro Public Library in North Carolina. Researchers are (1) collecting and analyzing data on demographic characteristics, program retention, hours spent in literacy activities, and student goals; and (2) studying students' experiences in the programs by conducting extensive ethnographic interviews, observations of classes and tutoring sessions, and focus groups.

This report describes the design of the LILAA persistence study, the strategies that participating libraries are using to increase student persistence, and emerging implementation issues. It describes existing patterns in student persistence, identifies factors that support or inhibit persistence, and begins to explore the relationship between program strategies and persistence. Early emerging findings, to be tested in later analysis, suggest that three categories of themes and their related strategies are particularly important in explaining student persistence:

- **Programmatic.** The programs in this study are able to provide individualized attention to students because they have stable leadership, access to technology, solid financial support, and relatively small student populations. Differences among the literacy programs do emerge, however, in terms of their integration into the larger library organization, which can affect program strategies.

- **Instructional.** The programs in this study try to be innovative in tailoring instructional methods to students' needs while maintaining an assessment system that allows them to measure learning gains. Relevant, high-quality instruction, appropriate to the reading level of students, is important.

- **Student-based.** Because the programs must address the needs of highly diverse students, they seek to develop strategies that can accommodate students' cultural and personal identities, goals, and learning disabilities as well as the interests of those who encouraged them to enter the program.

Further lessons about the implementation and impacts of persistence strategies in library literacy programs will emerge over the next two years — through reports on program implementation, levels of student persistence, and the relationship between persistence and literacy test scores — and will culminate in recommendations for program design and policy.

Contents

Tables and Figures vi
Preface vii
Acknowledgments viii

1 Introduction 1
- I. The Increasing Importance of Literacy 1
- II. The Importance of Student Persistence 2
- III. The LILAA Persistence Study 3
- IV. The Structure of This Report 4

2 The Context of the LILAA Persistence Study 5
- I. National Adult Literacy 5
- II. The History of Library Involvement in Literacy 7
- III. Current National Library Literacy Efforts 8
- IV. The Nature of Library Literacy Programs 8
- V. Student Persistence in Adult Literacy Programs 10
- VI. Research on Student Persistence 13
- VII. The Perspective of Adult Students 21

3 Description of the LILAA Persistence Study 22
- I. The LILAA Initiative and the Persistence Study 22
- II. Defining and Measuring Student Persistence 23
- III. Strategies and Interventions to Improve Student Persistence 25
- IV. The Research Design 28

4 Initial Common Themes from the LILAA Persistence Study 35
- I. Programmatic Themes 35
- II. Instructional Themes 38
- III. Student-Based Themes 42
- IV. Summary 43

5 Case Studies: The Sites in the LILAA Persistence Study 45
- I. New York Public Library 45
- II. Greensboro Public Library 48
- III. Redwood City Public Library 52
- IV. Queens Borough Public Library 56
- V. Oakland Public Library 60

6 Summary and Conclusions 65
- I. The Issue of Student Persistence 65
- II. The Opportunities and Challenges of Studying Persistence 65

Appendix The Libraries in the Larger LILAA Project 67

References 73
Recent Publications on MDRC Projects 77

Exhibits

Table 3.1 Reported Strategies for Improving Student Persistence in the LILAA Initiative 26

Figure 3.1 Hypothetical Effects of Persistence Strategies Over Time 30

Internet Sites Relating to the LILAA Persistence Study

Lila Wallace–Reader's Digest Fund (LWRD)
http://www.wallacefunds.org

Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC)
http://www.mdrc.org

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL)
http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu

New York Public Library
http://www.nypl.org

Greensboro Public Library
http://www.greensborolibrary.org

Redwood City Public Library
http://www.redwoodcity.org/library/rcpl.html

Queens Borough Public Library
http://www.queenslibrary.org

Oakland Public Library
http://www.oaklandlibrary.org

Preface

This report on student persistence in five public libraries that are taking part in the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative is an important addition to MDRC's growing portfolio of education program evaluations. From its studies of adult education provided to welfare recipients, MDRC has found that many adult students do not participate long enough to reap substantial learning gains. In response to this challenge, the library literacy programs in the persistence study are offering new types of services and instruction, such as child care and curricula designed for adults, that are intended specifically to foster persistence among the adult students whom they serve.

An evaluation of library-based literacy programs on the scale of the LILAA persistence study is a new endeavor for the literacy field. The effort is already yielding a sharper picture of the unique approaches that library-based programs bring to adult literacy instruction, and the stories presented in this report reveal the unique contributions of these programs. The report also explores common themes that are emerging as the library literacy programs implement strategies to increase persistence and characterizes each program and its students through detailed case studies. The lessons learned by implementing persistence strategies in these library programs may be useful also to other, non-library-based literacy programs, which often struggle with student persistence as well.

The process of defining student persistence and devising ways to measure it has created a lens through which to examine the effectiveness of literacy programs and a framework for exploring numerous issues and problems affecting them. The literacy programs in this study are developing a new understanding of their own operations — information that will help them not only to promote student persistence but also to address other challenges, such as increasing the effectiveness of the instruction they provide.

Judith M. Gueron

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we thank the many adult students who have shared their personal stories and helped us understand their experiences in library literacy programs. We are indebted as well to the staff and the volunteers of the literacy programs participating in the LILAA persistence study, whose commitment to this effort and cooperation with the research staff have benefited the entire project.

We are also grateful to our colleagues at MDRC for their contributions to this report. Valerie Chase, Joel Gordon, Jim Kemple, and David Navarro provided helpful guidance and reviewed drafts, and Michele Beleu painstakingly checked the report's many details and coordinated its final revision. Robert Weber edited the document, and Stephanie Cowell did the word-processing.

Finally, neither the persistence study nor this report would exist without the generous financial support and assistance of the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. We especially thank Edward Pauly and Sheila Murphy for their insights and thoughtful comments on earlier drafts of this document.

The Authors

Executive Summary

This report describes the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) persistence study, which is concerned with increasing the persistence of Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students in library literacy programs. In the context of this study, "persistence" is defined as students' ability to continue their learning efforts long enough and at a level that is intensive enough to ensure significant progress toward their literacy goals. Improving one's literacy is a challenging and time-consuming endeavor, especially for adult students with low initial literacy levels. To be successful, programs that provide literacy instruction to adult students must support not just their learning but also their ability to persist. The efforts of five such programs to improve student persistence are the primary focus of this study and this report.

Many public libraries in the United States provide literacy instruction or arrange for tutors to help patrons improve their literacy skills. Library-based literacy programs are an important component of the national adult literacy system, because libraries are often able to serve adult students who do not have access to literacy instruction elsewhere, either because their literacy skills are too low or because they are unable to attend classes at the times when other education providers offer them. Funded by a special grant from the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds, this study evaluates a set of strategies initiated by five library-based literacy programs to enhance persistence among their students. Those strategies include better student orientation, more tutor training, enhanced communication between the program and the students, more computer-based learning resources, and better monitoring of student activities, progress, and goals. This study will evaluate and document these strategies over a period of three years, and its findings not only will help the five programs learn from their experiences but also will share those experiences with the larger field of adult literacy.

I. The Library Literacy Programs in This Study

The five libraries participating in the LILAA persistence study are the New York Public Library in New York City; the Greensboro Public Library in Greensboro, North Carolina; the Redwood City Public Library in Redwood City, California; the Queens Borough Public Library in Queens, New York; and the Oakland Public Library in Oakland, California. In the two New York City-based libraries, the study focuses on specific literacy programs operating in six branches: Fordham and Wakefield in the Bronx, Seward Park in Manhattan, and Flushing, Rochdale Village, and Central in Queens. In Greensboro, the study focuses on the Glenwood and Chavis branches.

The library literacy programs in the persistence study differ substantially in many aspects of their operations. Some programs primarily provide ESOL services, while others provide literacy instruction and adult education for students who are native English speakers. Some of the programs are fairly small, serving fewer than a hundred students, while others are much larger and serve hundreds. Most of the programs use volunteer tutors to provide individual one-on-one tutoring, but several programs also provide classes and other forms of group instruction. All the programs have computer labs where students can practice their literacy skills using educational software, but the relative importance of computerized instruction varies across the programs.

II. The Research Team and the Research Design

The evaluation of the LILAA persistence study is being conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), a private nonprofit organization that tests initiatives to improve the well-being and self-sufficiency of poor people, and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), based in the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. The reports from this study reflect the ongoing collaboration among the two research organizations, the literacy program staff, and the students.

The evaluation has two distinct components. The NCSALL team members lead a *qualitative* research effort to study in depth the workings of the individual programs, their efforts at improving student persistence, and the factors affecting student persistence. Data collection for the qualitative component includes extensive ethnographic interviews, participant observation, documentary analysis, photography, focus groups, and Internet discussions. The MDRC team leads a *quantitative* research effort to collect and analyze program data over time. These data include such measures as students' demographic characteristics, retention in the program, hours spent in literacy activities, and personal goals. By studying how these measures change over time and relating such changes to the strategies to improve persistence, the quantitative research aims to document the effects of those strategies. The two components of the research are highly integrated and will inform one another at all stages of the study.

III. Themes Related to Student Persistence

Student persistence is a multidimensional concept. For students in literacy programs to be successful, they must remain active in the program long enough, participate for enough hours every week, receive instruction that fits their needs, and overcome barriers and distractions that may interfere with their ability to persist in achieving their goals.

Much of the persistence study is centered on three categories of "themes" that are developed for the first time in this report. Such themes describe student persistence and its patterns, the forces supporting or inhibiting persistence, and the relationship between program interventions and persistence. *Programmatic themes* explore the organization and integration of the literacy programs within the larger library systems and the programs' reflection of such core library principles as open access, privacy, and the respect and care that library programs show for adult students. *Instructional themes* that have been identified in the research include the quality of curricula and student assessment, the roles of technology, and the use and experience of volunteer tutors. Lastly, *student-based themes* focus on learning disabilities, students' cultural and personal identities, their sponsors, and their personal goals. All of these themes, and their manifestation in the five libraries' literacy programs, are described extensively in this report.

IV. Strategies to Improve Student Persistence

Staff members at each of the five sites in the LILAA persistence study have identified specific strategies that they plan to implement to increase student persistence in their literacy programs. These strategies fall into four categories: informational strategies, support strategies, operational strategies, and programmatic strategies.

A. Informational Strategies

As a first step in addressing the issue of student persistence, the library literacy programs have been asking their students (and sometimes staff members and tutors) how the programs can better support student persistence; such information was gathered by using focus groups, interviews, surveys, E-mail, List Serves, and staff meetings. For example, staff at Oakland's Second Start program conducted five focus groups with students and tutors during the first half of 2000, interviewed individual students who had left and returned to the program, and sent out a survey to all students and tutors. The staff compiled this information and discussed the results, finding few surprises. As expected, students asked for longer program hours, more classes, and a shorter wait to be matched with a tutor. The research did, however, produce two promising new insights: (1) students were more responsive to the idea of quarterly or semiannual reassessments of their literacy progress than staff expected them to be; and (2) students asked for more services for the entire family, focused not only on literacy but also on such critical topics as violence prevention, nutrition, hygiene, and manners. Thus, Second Start's implementation of informational strategies suggested new program components that might increase student persistence.

Informational strategies also include quantitative data collection, such as tracking students' participation records and demographic characteristics. Two of the sites, Oakland and Greensboro, worked directly with the research team to develop a new database system for collecting quantitative data. This system will benefit both the research effort and program management.

B. Support Strategies

As this report was being prepared, a number of new support strategies were under consideration by the programs, and several had been implemented. Lack of child care is often mentioned as a barrier to participation, but providing child care is expensive and potentially exposes programs to liability issues, so it is not yet a widely adopted support strategy. One exception is Redwood City, where Project READ offers preschool activities in the library for young children whose parents are meeting with a tutor or using the computers. Programs also have initiated family-based literacy activities, such as "family literacy night" in Oakland, which help address child care issues and at the same time offer valuable learning opportunities for the children.

Transportation problems are another barrier to participation, more so in some of the programs than in others. Oakland already provides transportation vouchers to its students, and other programs have considered doing so, but internal logistical reasons are making implementation difficult in some programs, and the inadequacy of the public transportation system in general is a problem in other programs.

Other support strategies that have been implemented or are under consideration include stress reduction classes, better information and referrals to outside agencies, and special services for prospective students who are on waiting lists.

C. Operational Strategies

Staff members at most of the programs are considering operational strategies that include increasing the hours of operation, improving student access to technology, and hiring more staff. Some programs already have extended their operating hours, which is easier to do when a program is located in its own space, rather than within a library building where hours may be less flexible.

Second Start in Oakland and the New York Public Library have both expanded their operating hours in order to be more accessible to students who work. This is an increasingly important consideration as more adult students move from welfare to work. In January 2000, Second Start added three more night sessions per week. Similarly, Saturday hours are now offered at the Fordham branch of the New York Public Library, and library staff at this site will monitor student participation to determine whether persistence increases.

D. Programmatic Strategies

Potential programmatic strategies to increase student persistence include making the curriculum more relevant to students, recruiting students in innovative ways, redesigning tutor training, redesigning student and tutor orientations, focusing on student and program goal-setting, and marketing other library services.

Beyond the literacy program's services, students may be unaware of the variety of resources available to them in the library, such as help with tax forms, access to the Internet, and various social and cultural events. Greensboro Public Library has begun to develop a campaign that will market many such library opportunities to students and potential students. This campaign began with a community-wide effort called Community of Readers, the goal of which is to increase both persistence rates and the use of library resources.

In another example of programmatic strategies, Redwood City's Project READ is paying special attention to the problems facing students who have learning disabilities and other special needs. During each student's initial assessment, staff members ask a series of questions designed to discover that person's learning challenges. Later, a learning specialist discusses these challenges with the student's tutor, identifying teaching strategies and making recommendations for individualized instruction.

For many students, tutors represent the face of the literacy program. Tutors need training and ongoing support to provide high-quality instruction, and several programs in the study are seeking to increase student persistence by improving their tutor training. For example, in the fall of 2000, the New York Public Library program completely redesigned its tutor training process.

The Queens Borough Public Library program is seeking to improve student persistence by making goal-setting an explicit part of the program experience and by creating specific benchmarks based on the traditional school calendar. The program will be structured around modules of instruction, and students and tutors will be encouraged to focus on completing the modules. Students will also set goals in the fall and will check on their progress toward these goals several times during the year.

Orientations for new students entering the program are another focus of programmatic strategies to increase persistence. At Second Start in Oakland, orientations for new students are planned and implemented by current students, whose participation in this activity is part of an effort to increase their voice in setting the direction of programming.

V. What to Expect from the Persistence Study

Specific lessons regarding the implementation and outcomes of persistence strategies in library literacy programs for adult students will emerge as the study continues. The present report describes the five library literacy programs and their efforts to increase student persistence through the fall of 2000. In 2002, an interim report will describe the first full year of implementation and present an early analysis of quantitative persistence data. A final report, to be completed in 2003, will present analyses of all the data collected, including an analysis of how persistence affects student performance on a battery of standardized literacy tests. The final report will also include estimates of the costs of implementing persistence strategies and will advise program designers and policymakers about how to increase student persistence.

Chapter 1

Introduction

I don't know what made me hang in there. I don't know what went through my head to stay, but I didn't do it for nobody here. I did it for myself because I know once I walk out that door, I'm gonna regret it. I'll wind up coming back again.

The speaker is Joe, a Puerto Rican student in the New York Public Library literacy program. Joe is one of many adults who participate in library literacy programs around the country in order to improve their reading, writing, and math skills. Adult students[1] like Joe participate in these programs so that they can have better lives, be more successful workers, or be better able to help their children. However, adult students in literacy programs face many barriers that make it difficult for them to persist in their studies long enough to make substantial progress toward establishing and meeting their goals and from "walk[ing] out that door."

Library literacy programs are one component of a large national system of adult education that is supported by federal, state, local, and private funds. The various agencies comprised by this system complement one another in serving a diverse population of adult students by offering a wide variety of services, including traditional daytime classroom instruction, night- and weekend classes, computer-based instruction, one-on-one and small-group tutoring, and various family literacy activities. In this national system of adult education, library literacy programs play an important role. Library literacy programs have special features and resources that enable them to serve adult students who cannot participate in community college-based programs or in programs provided by other adult education providers. Public libraries are permanent community institutions that have diverse resources, including books, computers, professional referrals, and space to support adult learning. Public libraries also provide direct literacy services to community members. Unlike the situation for other education providers, most funding for library literacy programs is not dependent on how quickly students become employed or enter more advanced programs. As a result, library literacy programs can afford to serve students who have very low initial literacy levels or special learning needs that require them to be engaged in basic literacy training for longer periods of time. Community colleges and other adult education providers often do not offer instruction for adults with very low literacy skills. Thus, many of the students who attend library literacy programs have no other education providers to whom they can turn to increase their literacy or English skills.

I. The Increasing Importance of Literacy

The growing emphasis on communication skills and computers in the U.S. economy has increased the importance of literacy and math skills, education credentials, and certification, even for jobs that previously required little education or training. A lack of literacy skills can mean the difference between holding a job and not being able to find or keep one. Workers who have difficulty reading and writing English may have no access to training opportunities on the job and may have little chance of earning a promotion or finding a more rewarding job. Some researchers attribute the growing earnings inequality in the U.S. labor market during the last two decades to the increasing importance of skills and education credentials.[2]

---

[1] For consistency, this report will refer to adult participants in library literacy programs as "students." However, the programs in the LILAA persistence study use a variety of terms. Many programs use "learner," many use "student," some programs use these terms interchangeably, and some programs use other terms.

Aside from these recent developments, there is a substantial body of research documenting the effects of literacy skills and educational attainment on people's earnings, their long-term success in the labor market, their family income, and their ability to escape poverty.[3] However, having limited literacy skills does not just affect people's ability to be successful workers. Literacy is increasingly important in virtually all areas of life, affecting people's ability to be educated consumers, active citizens, informed voters, and helpful parents and grandparents. Libraries are lifelong learning centers. In today's world, everyone needs to be a "lifelong learner" in order to adapt to the changing environment, but adults who lack basic skills often cannot take advantage of learning opportunities available to others. Adult education programs in general, and library literacy programs in particular, can help adult students bridge the gap between their limited literacy skills and their long-term educational, personal, and professional goals.

II. The Importance of Student Persistence

The goal of literacy instruction, and a primary reason why adult students participate in library literacy programs, is to achieve meaningful improvements in literacy skills. The problem in pursuing such improvements, however, is that the acquisition of literacy skills is not a simple, predictable process, in which one extra hour of study results in a specific measurable gain in literacy skills. Instead, research shows that meaningful improvements in adult literacy require a certain "threshold" level of participation in adult literacy programs.[4] This threshold level may be fairly short for some students but much longer for others, depending on the person's literacy goals, initial literacy level when entering the program, and individual learning needs. However, regardless of what each student's threshold level of participation is, programs must try to help students persist long enough to make meaningful literacy gains and reach their personal goals. For some students, this can mean hundreds or even thousands of hours of participation and study.

Unfortunately, participation in literacy programs is only one of many competing demands and activities facing adult students. Research shows that most adult students spend fewer than 50 hours engaged in organized instruction in a one-year period;[5] but most adult students need many more hours of instruction to make progress and several years of study to accomplish their literacy goals. Concerns about low levels of student persistence have become a major policy and program issue for library literacy programs and other providers of adult education, especially as more federal funding has become contingent on showing student progress, as will be discussed in greater detail below.

III. The LILAA Persistence Study

The Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative of the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds (WRDF) is helping 15 libraries around the country improve their literacy services and address the issue of student persistence. The persistence study described in this document is part of this larger project and focuses on five libraries that were selected as part of that larger effort. The selection of these sites is discussed later in this report.

---

[2] See Levy and Murnane, 1992; Burtless, 1994.

[3] See, for example, Mincer, 1974; Polachek and Siebert, 1993; Sum, Taggart, and Fogg, 1995.

[4] See, for example, Bos, Snipes, Scrivener, and Hamilton, 2001.

[5] Young, Fleischman, Fitzgerald, and Morgan, 1994.

The LILAA persistence study is a collaboration between libraries and researchers with the following objectives:

- a clearer but more complex definition of persistence
- better tools for measuring persistence
- a deeper understanding of the supports for and barriers to persistence
- an evaluation of programmatic approaches that seek to support greater persistence
- a broader context for understanding student persistence

The LILAA persistence study is also exploring and highlighting the unique role that libraries play in a comprehensive national system of adult education. The five library literacy programs participating in the persistence study are

- New York Public Library in New York City, Centers for Reading and Writing (CRWs)
- Greensboro Public Library in North Carolina
- Redwood City Public Library in California, Project READ
- Queens Borough Public Library in New York City, Adult Learning Centers (ALCs)
- Oakland Public Library in California, Second Start Adult Literacy Program

The researchers for the persistence study are on the staff of the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), which has offices in New York City and Oakland, California; and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), which is based at Harvard University. The project is funded by the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds and the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. The overall study and its quantitative aspects are managed by MDRC, while NCSALL has responsibility for the qualitative aspects of the study. The reports from this study reflect the ongoing collaboration among the two research groups, the program staff, and the students.

The findings from the persistence study will help the five library literacy programs learn from their experiences and share those experiences with the larger field of adult literacy. The study seeks to describe the strategies that library programs develop to increase adult student persistence, the ways in which these programs change as a result of implementing these strategies, and how persistence changes among their students.

In the first year of the study, the research team focused on the concept of persistence itself. As the five programs were developing strategies to improve persistence among their students, the research team designed a data collection system to capture relevant aspects of student persistence and progress in the library literacy programs, including length of time in the program; hours spent in classroom instruction, individual tutoring, and other program activities; hours spent using computer resources; students' goals; and various measures of student progress. The research team also visited each of the programs, working with program staff and students to better understand barriers and supports that affect student persistence, to record student learning and the ways students engage with the program, and to understand the process of identifying and planning persistence strategies.

Currently, the research team is interviewing students and staff and observing program services to study the implementation of the persistence strategies in each of the sites. (Site visits for that purpose have already begun.) This research will also identify difficulties in implementing persistence strategies and ways in which programs overcome these difficulties. On the quantitative side of the study, the team will use the programs' databases to compare cohorts of students over time to see how student persistence changes and whether program strategies appear to make a difference. Lastly, an "achievement study" will be conducted that is designed to assess the relationship between persistence and literacy outcomes among selected adults in four of the library literacy programs. This study will use standardized tests so that results will be comparable with other such research being conducted outside the present study.

The LILAA persistence study will result in four reports. The first report, *So I Made Up My Mind*, was released in September 2000 and was intended to publicize the initiative and provide brief descriptions of the study and the sites.[6] The present report provides an in-depth description of the study, its research design, the programs and strategies employed to increase student persistence, and the initial themes that are emerging during the pilot stages of the research. In early 2002, an interim impact and implementation report will describe the first full year of implementation and present an early analysis of the quantitative data on student persistence over time. In early 2003, a final report will present an analysis of all the qualitative and quantitative data collected, including data from the achievement study. This final report will also estimate the cost of implementing persistence-enhancing strategies and provide advice to program designers and policymakers about how to increase persistence among adult students.

IV. The Structure of This Report

This introduction is followed by a discussion of the context for the persistence study, in Chapter 2, which expands similar material in *So I Made Up My Mind*. The context chapter reviews relevant literature and discusses the history of library literacy programs. The next three chapters present the research design (Chapter 3), themes emerging from the initial qualitative research (Chapter 4), and case studies of the five library literacy programs in the persistence study (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 concludes the report by summarizing the importance of studying persistence and the opportunities and challenges. Finally, the Appendix briefly describes the 10 other library literacy programs that are part of the LILAA initiative but are not included in the persistence study.

---

[6] The present report shares some background sections with *So I Made Up My Mind* (Comings and Cuban, 2000). Readers can access this report via MDRC's Web site at www.mdrc.org.

Chapter 2

The Context of the LILAA Persistence Study

I. National Adult Literacy

In 1992, the U.S. Department of Education undertook the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS),[7] which measured literacy and math skills using a five-level scale. Each level represents a range of skills. At the bottom of level 1 are people who have almost no skill in literacy and math, while at the top of level 5 are people who can manage almost any literacy task. People who scored in the lowest range of NALS level 1 have very low levels of functional literacy that make it difficult for them to read even basic documents. Some people in NALS level 1 can locate a single piece of information in short and simple text, but they are at a disadvantage in tasks that require them to locate information in longer, moderately complicated text. They can solve simple math problems when the numbers and the operations are provided, but they find it difficult to solve the same problems when they must locate the numbers and the operations in a text passage. Those adults who scored at level 2 can locate information in moderately complicated text and can solve simple math problems when the numbers and operations must be found in text. Most adults in level 1 are at a severe disadvantage, and those in level 2 are disadvantaged in relation to the demands of twenty-first-century life.

Adults who scored in NALS level 3 are able to locate several pieces of information in complicated and lengthy text and can solve problems that require locating several numbers in text and determining which operation to use. Examples of NALS level 3 tasks include using a flight schedule to plan travel arrangements for a meeting, writing a brief letter to explain an error on a credit card bill, and identifying information from a bar graph that depicts several sources of energy and years of production. These are the kinds of skills needed in the twenty-first century, and most people in NALS levels 1 and 2 cannot accomplish these tasks or find it difficult to complete them correctly.

According to the NALS study, 21 percent to 23 percent of the U.S. adult population (approximately 40 million people in 1992) would score in NALS level 1, and an additional 25 percent to 28 percent of adults (approximately 50 million people) would score in NALS level 2.[8] A score in NALS level 1 or 2 is not the only indication that someone is educationally disadvantaged. Approximately 40 million adults lack a high school credential,[9] and at least 6 million adults cannot speak English, even though many of them may be literate in their own language. Most of the adults who lack a high school diploma — but not all — would score in NALS level 1 or 2. All of the adults who do not speak English would score in NALS level 1.

In *Teaching the New Basic Skills*, Murnane and Levy identify ninth-grade reading, writing, and math skills (along with communications, problem-solving, and computer skills) as being essential for economic success in today's workplace.[10] Most of the 50 million adults who would score in NALS level 2 do not meet these criteria, and the 40 million who would score in NALS level 1 are extremely disadvantaged in relation to this benchmark. People who lack English language fluency are also disadvantaged, and those who lack a high school diploma are often blocked from entering the vocational training and higher education programs that can lead to good employment.

---

[7] See Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, and Kolstad, 1993.
[8] Kirsch et al., 1993.
[9] National Center for Education Statistics, 1997.
[10] See Murnane and Levy, 1996.

These national statistics identify a very large potential population of beneficiaries from programs that help adults improve their basic skills, learn English, and acquire a high school credential. Although most of these adults can read and write, their English literacy and math skill levels are low enough to be a barrier to success in today's world. Many people in this population may never seek literacy or adult education services, either because they do not feel the need for such services or because they face some barrier to participation that is too great to overcome. However, the pool of potential participants in these programs could be as large as 50 million adults, which is equivalent to all the elementary and secondary students presently in the K-12 system.[11] Current adult education and literacy programs are not serving the vast majority of these potential students.

During the 1997-1998 academic year, for example, approximately 4 million adults sought to improve their literacy skills, increase their English language fluency, or acquire high school credentials in adult education programs in the United States.[12] These programs are usually identified by the terms Adult Basic Education (ABE), for students seeking to improve literacy and math skills; English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), for students seeking to improve English skills; and General Educational Development (GED) classes, for students preparing to take the GED test, which is designed to provide certification equivalent to a high school diploma. According to the most recent national study of library literacy programs, approximately 43,000 ABE and 31,000 ESOL students sought adult education services in libraries.[13]

As the LILAA persistence study begins, the larger field of adult literacy is undergoing major reforms. In 2000, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) replaced the previous federal support for adult literacy. As its name implies, WIA is focused on helping the unemployed and the working poor improve their position in the labor market and increase their incomes. However, WIA also supports other outcomes, such as improving children's performance in school and increasing participation in voting. WIA places greater demands for accountability — in terms of both academic achievement and impact on participants' lives — on all programs, including adult basic education, that accept federal funds. WIA's accountability system, the National Reporting System, uses standardized measures of academic achievement and indicators of program impact on employment. High persistence rates in adult education programs are essential for showing the kinds of achievement and impact captured by the National Reporting System and required by WIA. However, many adults drop out of programs before they can be tested for learning gains. Consequently, achievement and outcome data are not available for many participants, reducing the usefulness of the National Reporting System for policymakers. Its statistical reports are important in calling attention to the need for adult literacy services nationwide to improve student persistence rates, but statistics do not tell the whole story. More information is needed to understand why the available services are not being used by people who need them and why so many adults drop out of programs before they reach their goals.

---

[11] National Center for Education Statistics, 1997.

[12] U.S. Department of Education Web site: http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/98enrlbp.html.

[13] Estabrook and Lakner, 2000.

II. The History of Library Involvement in Literacy

In the nineteenth century, an expansion of the number of public libraries and schools grew out of a national commitment to provide free educational resources to both children and adults. The books housed in libraries were considered educational tools that could supplement the efforts of the schools and help adults achieve their vocational and lifelong learning goals. In the late 1880s, library leaders, such as Melvil Dewey, declared libraries a "people's university" with education and lifelong learning at the core.[14]

The explicit role of public libraries in support of literacy and adult education began early in the twentieth century as part of efforts to provide "Americanization programs" that sought to help new immigrants assimilate into the mainstream culture. Library staff provided new immigrants with assistance in obtaining citizenship, reading materials, and English language instruction. Such programs were promoted and supported by both government and business, and they helped libraries to increase their base of patrons. These programs offered some of the earliest forms of library literacy services to the new multiethnic, multilingual communities in the United States.[15]

By the 1930s, public libraries began to engage actively in adult education, providing adults with opportunities to continue their education after leaving school. At midcentury, libraries were regarded as one of the major institutions for delivering lifelong learning services, and many libraries had evolved into multipurpose community institutions whose role included adult education.[16]

In the 1960s, legislation made federal funding available for library literacy programs as part of the War on Poverty. As libraries began to look for ways to expand their services for patrons who were considered "disadvantaged" or "disenfranchised," adult literacy services became an integral part of outreach efforts to people with less education.[17] Library educators argued that librarians had the social responsibility to provide access to all members of the communities they served.[18] Library-based literacy programs were viewed as a bridge for populations who had not been seeking library services.[19] Several studies[20] in the 1960s and 1970s pointed to a need for library involvement in literacy services, training in literacy education for librarians, special attention to the reading interests of people with low literacy skills, development of literacy collections, and a commitment by libraries to this cause. The American Library Association (ALA) and the Public Library Association (PLA) both supported this effort. By the 1980s and 1990s, literacy programs were increasingly being recognized as an important part of many libraries.[21]

---

[14] See Birge, 1981; Shirk, 1983; Vann, 1978.

[15] See Monroe, 1986.

[16] See Birge, 1981; Lee, 1966; Monroe, 1986.

[17] See Birge, 1981; Brown, 1975; Weibel, 1982; Nauratil, 1985; Rolstad, 1990; Schmidt, 1978; Lyman, 1977a, 1977b; McCook, 1992; Weingand, 1986.

[18] See Coleman, 1983; Owens, in Bundy and Stielow, 1987.

[19] See Spangenberg, 1996.

[20] See American Library Association, 1964; Appalachian Adult Education Center, 1973; Eyster, 1976; McDonald, 1966; Hiatt, 1965; Lyman, 1973; Lipsman, 1972.

[21] See Spangenberg, 1996; Estabrook and Lakner, 2000; American Library Association, 1998; Seager, 1993.

III. Current National Library Literacy Efforts

The Library Research Center at the University of Illinois[22] recently completed a study of national trends in library literacy programs. This study included a nationally representative sample of 1,067 library systems and found that libraries are "active partners in the provision of adult literacy programs and services"[23] in these four forms:

- Developing collections that support existing literacy programs (83.1 percent)
- Maintaining information about literacy services in the community (94.1 percent)
- Partnering with existing literacy programs by providing space (83.9 percent) and referring patrons to program services (93.4 percent)
- Providing or sponsoring direct instruction in literacy (30.1 percent)

More than 80 percent of all libraries in the survey provided the first- and second types of support, and more than 90 percent provided referrals; but only 30.1 percent provided their own literacy services. Other national studies have found similar low rates of direct literacy instruction in libraries.[24]

In 1998, the American Library Association (ALA) adopted twenty-first century literacy as one of the five key action areas that support its mission to provide the highest-quality library and information services for all people. ALA's commitment is evidenced by its Office of Outreach and Literacy Services (OLOS), which is staffed by a director and a literacy officer who promote literacy throughout the diverse library community nationwide. Since 1998, OLOS has supported an annual pre-conference meeting at the national ALA conference, a Web site, and an Internet List Serve (a discussion group on the Internet) dedicated to issues that have an impact on library literacy programs.[25]

IV. The Nature of Library Literacy Programs

Library-based literacy programs that offer direct instruction in literacy serve students who do not have strong basic skills, who do not speak English, or who lack a high school diploma. These library literacy programs use multiple instructional methods, including classroom teaching, one-on-one or small-group tutoring, facilitated self-study, computer-aided instruction, and various combinations of these approaches. Generally, instruction and tutoring in literacy programs are focused on one or more of the following three skill areas: adult basic skills, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and preparation for the General Educational Development (GED) test. Each of these will be discussed in some detail below.

A. Adult Basic Skills Instruction

The first level of basic skills instruction is provided to students whose reading skills are below the fifth-grade level, which is equivalent to level 1 in the NALS. People who read at this level may have a learning disability that hinders them from decoding the sounds of a word with the ease needed to read effectively. Students at this level need basic reading instruction and practice to build their speed and comprehension. Adults whose reading skills are this limited usually need instruction in writing and basic math, as well.

---

[22] See Estabrook and Lakner, 2000.

[23] Estabrook and Lakner, 2000, p. 1.

[24] See Zweizig, Robbins, and Johnson, 1988.

[25] OLOS can be reached at http://www.ala.org/literacy.

A second level of adult basic skills instruction is provided to students who do not have severe reading disabilities and who do not have significant problems with decoding. Adults at this level read above a fourth-grade level, which is equivalent to NALS level 2. Adult students at this level usually score low on tests of oral vocabulary and background knowledge. Students at this level must engage in a good deal of practice in reading. They should be learning to read more, to read many different kinds of materials, and to read more challenging materials than they have been used to reading. Adults who score at level 2 also need practice and instruction in writing and math.

B. English for Speakers of Other Languages

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instruction begins with learning to speak and understand the English language but eventually includes reading and writing in English as well. At the beginning level, students must practice pronunciation and develop a vocabulary of English words. As they progress, they move from simple common phrases to the expression of ideas and feelings. Eventually these students move from needing ongoing instruction in English to needing practice that challenges them to improve their ability to communicate in English.

A small percentage of immigrant students have never learned to read in their native language, and this makes learning to read English more difficult. Some programs start by improving the students' literacy in their native language, if a teacher or tutor who speaks that language is available, and then move on to English literacy. This approach is not possible in most cases, however, and so students have to learn how to read and master a new language as they are learning to read for the first time.

C. GED and Pre-GED Preparation

The General Educational Development (GED) test is the most common way — aside from traditional graduation from high school — to earn a high school credential. The GED is a set of five tests that measure writing skills, social studies, science, interpreting literature and the arts, and math.[26] To obtain a GED certificate, an adult must achieve a minimum score on each of the five tests as well as a minimum total score. Programs help adults prepare for the GED by providing assessments, administering practice tests, and teaching the basic skills and knowledge needed to pass the test. Some library literacy programs offer "pre-GED" preparation to help students with low initial literacy levels gain access to GED programs, which then help them pursue the credential.

Passing the GED test is a milestone for many adult learners, and there is evidence that GED attainment has an impact that goes beyond the satisfaction of earning the credential itself. GED test-takers with higher scores tend to earn higher wages.[27] In addition, students who go on to vocational training or higher education after passing the GED do better in the labor market,[28] and the greater cognitive skills demonstrated by a higher score on the GED supports success in these programs and in the labor market.[29] Many of the students in library literacy programs, however, are far below this skill level and need much pre-GED preparation.

---

[26] The GED test is currently being updated, and the revised test will contain more business-related and adult-context information texts. It will also allow the use of a calculator for parts of its mathematics tests. The new GED test will be introduced in January 2002.

[27] See Tyler, Murnane, and Willett, 2000.

[28] See Bos, Snipes, Scrivener, and Hamilton, 2001.

V. Student Persistence in Adult Literacy Programs

A key difference between adult and child learners is that most adults make a conscious choice to participate in education programs, whereas children participate because of legal mandates and strong social and cultural forces that identify schooling as the proper "work" of childhood.[30] In fact, most school-age students probably never seriously consider dropping out. Adult students, on the other hand, must make an active decision to participate in each class session, and often they must overcome significant barriers (including negative experiences of school at a younger age) and competing interests in order to attend classes.

A common goal of adult education programs is to help students persist in learning until they reach their educational goals. However, student persistence in learning may extend beyond attendance in a specific program. When circumstances force a student to drop out of a program, he or she may still persist in learning through self-study or distance education or by returning to a program after a lapse in attendance. Thus, adult students may view persistence very differently than program providers do. Adults may see persistence as staying in a program for as long as possible, engaging in self-directed study when they need to drop out of a program, and returning to a program as soon as the demands of life allow.[31] Persistence should entail a continuous learning process that lasts until an adult student meets his or her educational goals. Additionally, persistence can be viewed from multiple perspectives that include all the participants and their experiences and roles in a wide context.

In adult education programs, "persistence" is usually measured narrowly as participation and retention in formal classes, small-group instruction, or tutoring sessions — all within a single episode of participation. More inclusive definitions of persistence consider the fact that students may stop participating and restart at a later time; and they also take into account progress toward goals, barriers overcome, and a host of activities that do not fall under formal classes or tutoring sessions but that do improve literacy.[32] Measuring persistence in its broader definition is complicated. In particular, dropouts from adult literacy classes are often difficult or impossible to contact, making it difficult to impossible to capture continued persistence in learning. If measures of persistence exclude continued learning by dropouts on their own or in different programs, a persistence rate that is based on attendance records will almost always be lower than the persistence rate as seen from the perspective of the student.

Moreover, many literacy programs provide educational experiences that are outside the class or tutoring activity, such as field trips, theater visits, community and socialization activities, discussion groups, and story hours involving parents and children. All these activities may peovide important learning opportunities, but most of them are not commonly analyzed or included in participation measures. In the present study, many of these activities *are* included in the persistence data, to the extent that the data systems could capture them.

---

[29] See Bos et al., 2001.
[30] See Knowles, 1970; Cross, 1981.
[31] Comings, Parrella, and Soricone, 1999.
[32] See Sticht, 1982.

Despite these limitations, however, program-based data systems that capture time in class or in tutoring probably do offer good measures of persistence for comparisons between populations of adult students, across different programs, and especially within the same program over time. These data systems may undercount participation or miss some persistence, but they do provide estimates that are useful for comparison.

According to the National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs (NEAEP), 33 percent of the adults who enroll in ABE classes and who attend for at least one hour drop out before completing 35 hours (10 weeks) of instruction. The number of hours is higher for ESOL students, 50 percent of whom persist for 113 hours (16 weeks), but is lower for GED students at 28 hours (8 weeks). Only about 11 percent of ABE and 9 percent of GED students attend classes continuously for a year, while approximately 25 percent of ESOL students attend for the same time period. Inevitably, the low persistence rate of adult students places a severe limitation on how much progress they can make.

NEAEP interviewed 3,403 adults who left ABE, ESOL, and GED programs.[33] Of these, 41 percent reported that they left satisfied, and 45 percent left because of noninstructional factors such as a lack of transportation, a loss of child care, or a change in work. Only 7 percent reported leaving because of instructional factors, while 7 percent left for a combination of reasons or gave no reason. NEAEP found that most dropouts left their programs within the first 12 weeks of instruction. However, participants who stayed more than one month were likely to persist for a period 45 percent longer than those who did not complete one month, and this differential in persistence increased as more months of participation passed. Those who stayed past the first month were likely to stay for eight months. Since many programs operate on an academic schedule, eight months may indicate completion of one full year of study by a committed participant who may return for a second year. These findings from NEAEP support the contention of some experts that the first three to six weeks of program participation are key to persistence.[34]

NEAEP data were collected over a 12-month period in 1991 and 1992 and represent a cross-section of participation in specific programs. The findings presented above may not paint an accurate picture of each individual's pattern of participation. That is, some of the people who were identified as a dropout after a few weeks may have returned to that program or entered another program during that year. In addition, adults with short-term participation in one year might have gone on to participate again in that program or in another program the next year. A study of ESOL students in California, for example, suggests that 25 percent of those who were identified as dropouts may actually have transferred to other classes or programs.[35]

The low persistence rate reported in NEAEP places a significant limitation on the benefits of classroom instruction. Several studies have identified that approximately 100 hours of instruction are needed for an increase of one grade-level equivalent on a standardized test.[36] Although an increase of one grade level in what is approximately 10 percent of the time that a child spends in a grade may seem high, the adult and child learning experiences are not comparable. The adults are spending all their learning time focused on the skills measured by the test, and in many cases they are probably relearning skills that have not been used for many years, whereas the children are learning completely new skills. Unfortunately, most adult participants are not in class for 100 hours. Although some adults who enter ABE, ESOL, and GED programs may have specific goals that require only a few hours of instruction, most adult students have instructional needs that require a more sustained and long-term effort. Even 100 hours of study, therefore, are probably inadequate for most adult students to reach their long-term goals.

---

[33] See Young, Fleischman, Fitzgerald, and Morgan, 1994. The data reported in this paragraph and the next are from this source.

[34] See Quigley, 1997.

[35] See Sticht, McDonald, and Erickson, 1998.

[36] See Sticht, 1982; Darkenwald, 1986.

NEAEP found that 44 percent of ABE, ESOL, and GED participants left their programs satisfied, and yet only 5 percent left having achieved their goals. Since adults are leaving programs before completing the 100 hours needed to make measurable progress, and since they are reporting that their goals have not been achieved, improving persistence rates is critical for any effort to increase program impacts. GED students had the highest percentage of satisfied students (54 percent), followed by ABE (41 percent) and ESOL (29 percent). Students' satisfaction appears to be inversely related to their hours or weeks of instruction.

Common sense argues that there must be a relationship between length of time in class and achievement, but NEAEP found no direct relationship between persistence and improvement in scores on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) for ABE and GED participants.[37] Since GED students had already scored high on the TABE, an increase in score was probably unlikely. NEAEP did find a positive relationship for ESOL participants on the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) reading test. In another study, Perin and Greenberg found a positive relationship between weeks of instruction and scores on writing and math tests, but not on tests of reading.[38] Their population, though, comprised adults who had either a high school diploma or a GED certificate and were preparing for college-level coursework; such participants may have had reading levels that were too high to show any benefit within a limited time of instruction. Comings found a relationship between duration of study and achievement and skill retention in literacy programs in Third World settings,[39] but these findings may not be applicable to the U.S. population. Bos et al. found a nonlinear relationship between participation in ABE programs and literacy as measured with the Test of Applied Literacy Skills (TALS) for a sample of welfare recipients in welfare-to-work programs. The benefits of participation in these programs were limited until a threshold of one year of participation was reached. After that, an additional month spent in an ABE program appeared to have roughly the same value in terms of increased literacy as a month of regular high school.[40] In Massachusetts, an analysis of state data found that increased hours of instruction did predict learning gains for ABE and ESOL students.[41]

The difficulty of measuring learning gains among adult students complicates the discussion of the relationship between persistence and achievement. Non-ESOL adults with low literacy skills may have learning disabilities that interfere with assessment of achievement. ESOL adults who are not literate in their own language may have trouble learning to read in a language they do not fully understand. If achievement comes slowly, existing tests may not provide the sensitivity needed to measure learning gains, particularly since many of the teachers who administer the tests have little or no training in test administration. Even the finding that 100 hours of instruction lead to an increase of one grade-level equivalent on a standardized test is suspect. Many factors other than achievement might result in such age increase, and there are no reports that continued hours of instruction result in similar gains. The one grade-level increase after 100 hours of instruction may reflect that students become familiar with the test after the first measurement or that they feel more relaxed when taking the second test.

---

[37] Young et al., 1994.

[38] Perin and Greenberg, 1993.

[39] Comings, 1995.

[40] This was measured by comparing TALS scores at program intake for sample members who dropped out of high school at different grade levels. See Bos et al., 2001.

[41] See Comings, Sum, and Uvin, 2001.

Although the relationship between persistence in adult education programs and gains in student achievement is not yet well understood, there is sufficient evidence that persistence matters to warrant continued efforts to promote it.[42] Adults whose literacy and math skills fall in NALS levels 1 and 2 probably need hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of study and practice to raise their skills to a level that would substantially improve their opportunities in the labor market, their ability to help their children succeed in school, and their ability to learn about the issues that affect their community. Understanding how to help adults persist in their studies, therefore, is an important step toward increasing the impact of adult education programs.

The importance of persistence is supported by several studies that used "agenda-setting exercises" to identify the research priorities of stakeholders in adult education programs.[43] In three of these exercises, adult students, teachers, administrators, and policymakers all identified learner motivation to persist as one of the most important research questions that need to be addressed to improve adult education programs.[44]

VI. Research on Student Persistence

Much of the literature on student persistence draws on research involving adult students who had sufficient literacy skills, spoke English, and had high school diplomas. Though this research is informative, it may not be directly applicable to ABE, ESOL, and GED students. Largely, this research pertains to short-term courses with defined, limited goals, such as vocational classes and certificate programs. In contrast, ABE, ESOL, and GED students usually face a long-term commitment that may involve many different goals that change over time. In its descriptive nature, the persistence literature may outline the problem well, but it does not necessarily provide insights into how to help adults persist in their studies.

Five scholars and their associates have looked at adult student persistence from different perspectives,[45] and the following sections summarize their findings.

Beder. Beder (1991) provides a comprehensive and thorough review of key factors that play into an adult's decision to participate and persist in adult education. The review first explores motivation as the force that helps adults overcome barriers to participation that their lives impose on them and then focuses more closely on those specific barriers. Beder suggests that adult education programs must change their recruitment and instruction practices to be congruent with the motivations and life contexts of adult learners. If programs do so, more adults will enter them, and students will persist longer.

---

[42] In addition, the present study will add to this research by examining how persistence and achievement are related in the library literacy programs included in the study.

[43] In these studies, groups of respondents were asked to rank what they deemed to be the most important research questions for the field of ABE, ESOL, and GED.

[44] See Bickerton, Comings, Shields, and Waldron, 1995; Center for Applied Linguistics, 1998; National Institute for Literacy, 2001.

[45] See Beder, 1991; Wikelund, Reder, and Hart-Landsberg, 1992; Tracy-Mumford, 1994; Quigley, 1997; Comings, Parrella, and Soricone, 1999.

Beder finishes his review by building on two studies[46] that looked at the barriers from the point of view of participants and potential participants. Hayes identified five factors: low self-confidence, social disapproval by friends and family, negative attitudes toward adult literacy instruction, low personal priority, and situational barriers. Beder identified four factors: low perception of need, perceived effort, dislike for school, and situational barriers. Together, these studies point to perceptions by some adults that they may not benefit from participation in education programs, may not be able to learn, do not like participating in formal learning programs, or are unwilling to overcome the many barriers to participation. This describes a powerful set of negative forces that keep adults from entering or persisting in adult education programs.

Beder suggests that there may not be a lot that can be done about adult students' low perceptions of the need to increase their literacy skills. Such perceptions may be correct for many adults, even those who have very low literacy skills. Perceived effort may reflect low self-confidence in relation to the task of learning, which many adults perceive as extremely difficult; improving their reading, writing, math, and English skills to the point where they can pass the GED test is difficult. In addition, finding the time and energy for classes and individual study is difficult for people who also have the normal adult responsibilities of family, work, and community and who face other challenges in daily life. Such responsibilities and challenges are real and daunting, and they become situational barriers to participation. Also, programs that too closely resemble school may rekindle memories of negative learning experiences, which many adult students carry with them.

Beder concludes by making suggestions about dealing with nonparticipation and the tendency of adult learners to "drop out" of literacy programs. He acknowledges that the system, at this time, probably has only enough resources to serve those who are eager to enter classes. He notes, however, that this position ignores the social costs of an undereducated population and the socialization process that leads many adults to be uninterested in further education. Although education is never easy, Beder suggests that the effort could be more productive if programs had the resources to fit instruction to the needs and learning styles of adults. The same can be said for making adult programs less like school and more like an activity in which adults would want to participate.

Wikelund, Reder, and Hart-Landsberg. Wikelund, Reder, and Hart-Landsberg (1992) draw from the same sources as Beder, but they critique the reductionist tendencies of research and suggest that a useful theory of participation would incorporate the complexities of this phenomenon. Their review calls for broadening the definition of "participation" to acknowledge that adults engage in education in many ways other than by attending formal classes. It also explores the ways in which existing research and theory fail to provide programs with useful models for defining participation.

Wikelund et al. criticize the concept of "nonparticipant" because it implies that every adult who has low literacy skills needs to enter a program — an assumption that may not be true — and it suggests that research on nonparticipants has some value for the field. After examining several studies that are quoted in Beder (1991), the review concludes with a later Beder (1992) article that identifies three categories of nonparticipants. The first group is the "demand population," who are motivated to participate and who have no significant barriers to doing so. The second group is "motivated but constrained"; these adults are motivated to participate, but such external barriers as the lack of child care keep them from entering programs. The third group includes "resisters," who are not motivated to participate.

---

[46] See Hayes, 1988; Beder, 1990.

Wikelund et al. reinforce Beder (1991) by coming to similar conclusions from a different path, but the conclusions are still based on the same foundation. The review concludes that research and theory, as well as practice, should break out of the framework of K-12 school practice. A new definition of participation would acknowledge that adult learning, even improvements in literacy skills, can take place outside formal programs. With this new definition, programs can increase student persistence by continuing to support learning at times when adults are not able to attend classes or other formal activities. Classes can serve as part of an instructional process that involves other aspects of a student's life.

Tracy-Mumford. Tracy-Mumford (1994) focuses her review on retention and summarizes the findings of a large number of studies in order to offer advice on how to improve program quality. This review calls for programs to develop a commitment to and a plan for increasing retention. A program commitment to retention, Tracy-Mumford suggests, sends a strong message to students that the program is there to help them reach their goals. Since students' goals can change, the program must be flexible and accommodate new goals that arise. For the commitment of learners to be meaningful, the program should have a set of criteria for measuring persistence as well as defined strategies that reduce dropout, increase student hours of attendance, improve achievement, increase attainment of personal goals, and improve completion rates.

Tracy-Mumford defines an effective retention plan as one that provides support to students and improves instruction. The review summarizes all its findings with a list of elements of a student retention plan that weaves retention strategies into all aspects of the program structure:[47]

- Recruitment should provide enough information that potential students can make an informed decision about enrolling.
- Intake and orientation should help students understand the program, set realistic expectations, build a working relationship with program staff, and establish learning goals.
- Initial assessment should provide students and teachers with information on both cognitive and affective needs, should be integrated with instruction, and should form the foundation for measuring progress.
- Programs and teachers should recognize student achievement.
- Counseling should identify students at risk of dropping out early.
- Referral services should coordinate with other agencies to ensure that all students are connected to the support services they need.
- A system for student contact and follow-up with dropouts should help students return to the program and provide information on ways to improve service.
- Noninstructional activities should help form a bond between the program and its students and their families.
- Program evaluation should involve students in assessing and offering advice on each aspect of the program.

---

[47] Tracy-Mumford, 1994, pp. 23-25.

- Child care and transportation assistance should be provided.
- Instruction and instructional staff should be of sufficient quality to support effective learning.
- Student retention teams should coordinate dropout prevention activities, collect data on student retention, and involve students and teachers.

Tracy-Mumford's list is comprehensive and actionable because it translates theory into practical advice. Most programs lack the level of funding that would allow them to follow all of this advice, but following some of it may contribute to increased student persistence.

Quigley. Quigley (1997) views persistence as being significantly affected by the negative schooling experiences that adult learners had when they were younger and suggests the need to change adult literacy programs to be very different from the K-12 school experience. Quigley sees three major constellations of factors that contribute to dropout, referring to them as "situational" (influences of the adult's circumstances), "institutional" (influences of systems), and "dispositional" (influences of the adult's previous experience in school).[48] He suggests that the societal factors involved in situational influences are largely beyond the control of adult education programs, even though such factors receive most of the attention in the literature on dropouts. Institutional influences, he says, are areas that practitioners need to work on continuously. Finally, the dispositional influences, he believes, provide a place from which program improvement might begin to affect student persistence.

Quigley focuses his attention on adults who drop out in the first few weeks of a program and on the dispositional influences that he believes cause such early dropout. He believes that adults have overcome situational barriers before they arrive at a program and that although those arrangements may fall apart later, they have little effect in the first few weeks. Institutional barriers, too, have been overcome and, if they still exist, will have an effect later as they cause problems that build up over time.

Concluding that at least one-third of incoming adult students are at risk of dropping out in the first three weeks of instruction, Quigley reports findings from two studies that he undertook of incoming students, in which he tried three interventions: intensive support by a team of teachers and counselors, small groups, and one-on-one tutoring. The small-group approach produced the highest persistence, followed by the team approach, and then one-on-one tutoring. All three intervention groups had higher persistence rates than the comparison group, which attended the regular class program.

Quigley suggests that the intake and orientation processes of the first three weeks are critical to improving student persistence. Recommending that intake begin with goal-setting and planning for success, he advises that students should then be matched to teachers and classes that can meet their goals and learning needs. Since students are adults, they can take charge of this process, but they may need help in the form of careful questions about their learning goals and the provision of useful information for making learning decisions. Quigley reiterates his belief that an adult student's prior history of negative experiences with school is an important factor that needs to be addressed during these critical first three weeks of instruction.

---

[48] See also Cross, 1981, for barriers.

Comings, Parrella, and Soricone. Comings, Parrella, and Soricone (1999) found that the many ways in which adult students can be classified (by gender, ethnicity, age, employment status, number and age of children, prior school experience, and educational background of other adults in their lives) do not tell much about how to help them persist in their education. The significant findings in this study are that immigrants, adults over the age of 30, and parents of teenage or grown children were more likely to persist than other adult students. The greater likelihood of persistence by immigrant students in ESOL classes is well documented, and the findings of this study suggest that this effect continues as immigrants learn English and move on to ABE and GED programs. Grown children of adult students might encourage their parents to join and persist in a program. On the other hand, adults who are over 30 are more likely to have teenage or grown children than those under 30. These findings might suggest that older students persist longer because they benefit from the maturity that comes with age and they no longer have the responsibilities of caring for young children.

In this study, two aspects of the educational experience were also associated with student persistence. First, adults who had been involved in previous efforts at basic skills education, self-study, or vocational skill training were more likely to persist than those who had not. This relationship was particularly strong for adults who had undertaken self-study. Second, adults who, when asked why they had entered a program, mentioned a specific goal (such as to help their children or to get a better job) were more likely to persist than those who either mentioned no goal or said that they were doing it for themselves. These two relationships suggest that motivation — especially as demonstrated by undertaking self-study or by being clear about the goal of attendance — is a support to persistence.

The pre-GED students in this study identified a wide range of supports and barriers to their persistence, but clear trends were evident when their responses were analyzed. The study team recorded these trends and then looked back at the literature it had reviewed and the experience of practitioners who had been interviewed. The team then developed the following advice, centering on *four supports to persistence.*

Support 1: Manage the positive and negative forces that help or hinder persistence. In searching for a framework for analyzing data, the Comings team sought a theoretical model that would both place the adult learner in a central position and be useful to program managers who are seeking practical advice on how to increase persistence. The study team chose to employ a *force-field analysis* as developed by sociologist Kurt Lewin. Lewin's theory places an individual in a field of forces that are supporting or inhibiting action along a particular path.[49] *Understanding the forces, identifying which are strongest, and deciding which are most amenable to manipulation provide an indication of how to help someone move in a desired direction — in this case, reaching an educational goal.*

For adult students, there are positive forces (such as the desire for greater income) that are helping support persistence in an adult education program. These forces help adults to continue their participation. On the other hand, negative forces (such as the lack of free time to study) are pushing adults to drop out. From the time adults enter a program to the time when they either achieve their goals or drop out, both positive and negative forces are acting on them. *Any intervention meant to increase persistence must help adults strengthen the positive forces and lessen the negative forces.* The first step is to identify all the forces that are acting on an individual. The next step is to identify which of these forces are strong enough to have a significant effect on the individual's path. Finally, a determination must be made as to which of these strong forces can actually be managed — or, rather, which positive forces can be made stronger and which negative forces can be made weaker.

---

[49] See Lewin, 1999; Lindzey and Aronson, 1985.

The force-field analysis views these barriers and supports as having various levels of importance, ranging from those that have no real effect on persistence to those that have a very strong influence on it. The analysis also suggests that improvement in one force that can be influenced might offset the effects of another force that cannot be influenced. Thus, an adult with a very strong need for education in order to gain better employment might put aside the embarrassment of participating in a program, whereas very strong embarrassment might keep a less strongly motivated student from participating.

Adult education programs should help students develop an understanding of the negative and positive forces that affect their persistence. Building on that understanding, each student can then make plans to manage these forces so that persistence is more likely.

Adult students in this study emphasized positive forces. Most learners mentioned at least three positive forces, while some mentioned many more. The strongest positive force mentioned by adult students was the support of other people — particularly their families, friends, teachers, and fellow students — followed by self-efficacy and personal goals. In contrast, many learners mentioned no negative forces or just one, which was usually specific to the individual's situation.

The force-field theory itself offers a tool for understanding and planning to manage the forces that affect persistence. Students can be encouraged to discuss their persistence in terms of the force field and to base their plans on that discussion. A classroom force-field activity can begin with students identifying all the supports and barriers to their persistence. They can then categorize the forces into those that are most likely to help or hinder their persistence. Once the crucial forces are identified, students can plan to strengthen their supports and weaken their barriers. In some cases, of course, the outcome of this activity may be the early dropout of students who, for whatever reason, are not ready to persist in their studies. If this is the outcome, students should be helped in making a plan to return to the program and be successful later, if at all possible. The analysis and management of the forces that affect persistence may be an individual responsibility or may be taken on by a group of students or even by an entire community. For example, most students in a class are likely to have transportation needs; a group force-field might lead to ride-sharing or a request to a public agency for transportation support.

Support 2: Build self-efficacy. The educational program must help adult students build self-efficacy about reaching their goals. Although the term "self-confidence" is used more often in adult education literature, it is a general term that describes a global feeling of being able to accomplish most tasks. *Self-efficacy* more usefully focuses on a specific task and describes the feeling of being able to accomplish that task — in this case, successful learning in ABE, ESOL, or GED programs. The Comings study drew from the theory of social scientist Albert Bandura for advice on building self-efficacy.[50] In particular, adult education programs should provide the following kinds of experiences to help participants build self-efficacy:

- *Mastery experiences* are those that allow an adult to be successful in learning and to have authentic evidence of that success. This does not mean that instruction should be designed to produce only easy and constant success. Adults also need experience in overcoming failure and eventually achieving success through a sustained effort, and instruction should help them develop this insight. Some programs take care to provide regular recognition of students' progress and to celebrate their achievements. Others make sure that instruction provides opportunities for success early in program participation. These efforts give students the opportunity to experience success.

---

[50] See Bandura, 1986.

- *Vicarious experiences* are those that are provided by social models. Adult learners should come in contact with adults who are just like them and who have succeeded in an ABE, ESOL, or GED class. These role models — both through the knowledge they share directly and through the indirect teaching of their behavior — help adult students acquire the skills needed to manage the many demands of learning. Some programs include successful present or former students as speakers during intake and orientation activities, while others recruit former participants to be counselors, teachers, and directors. Former students model success and allow current students to experience it vicariously.
- *Social persuasion* that reinforces self-efficacy — support from teachers, staff, counselors, fellow students, family, and friends. Adult students need verbal assurances, in part to overcome their negative experiences with learning during K-12 schooling. Most adult education practitioners give verbal assurances, and some programs also encourage students' family members to provide positive reinforcement. Teachers often take great care to develop a culture of support among students in their classes. Such efforts reinforce students' self-efficacy through positive social persuasion.
- *Opportunities to address physiological and emotional states* help students to cope with the tension, stress, and other negative emotions that can both result from and lead to poor self-efficacy. Adult learners must be helped to perceive and interpret their emotional states in ways that do not affect their self-efficacy. Some practitioners feel uncomfortable addressing students' personal problems, and all practitioners must acknowledge that they are not trained mental health or social service professionals. Even so, many teachers use life histories and dialogue journals to help students identify the physical and mental health problems that can affect their learning. Simply acknowledging that life experiences affect learning can help diminish their negative effects on students.

Many of the orientation and instructional activities used by the programs in the study by Comings et al. provide the experiences that Bandura has outlined. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy can act as a powerful framework within which programs can improve on the activities they already provide.

Support 3: Help students establish their goals. The ongoing process of goal-setting begins even before an adult enters a program. Someone who could be classified as a potential ABE, ESOL, or GED student experiences an event that causes him or her to begin thinking about entering an education program. The event might be something dramatic; for example, a well-paid worker might lose her job and discover that she lacks the basic skills needed for a new job with similar pay. The event might be less dramatic; for example, a young father might decide that he needs more education when his first child begins school. Or the event might be subtle; for example, a mother who dropped out of school might have always felt the desire to study for the GED, and when her children are older and need less attention, she finally has the time needed for education. Such events provide potential adult students with goals that they hope to accomplish by entering an

ABE, ESOL, or GED program. The staff of the program must help potential adult students define their goals and understand the many instructional objectives on the road to achieving them. Teachers must then use those student goals as the context for instruction, and since goals may change, they must revisit goal-setting.

The Equipped for the Future (EFF) initiative[51] offers an approach to understanding and defining the educational objectives needed to reach the most common goals expressed by adults in this study. Other goal-setting approaches might work as well, but one powerful factor in favor of EFF is that it focuses on the broader purposes of education, which include the adult roles of worker, family member, and citizen. Goals related to both work and family are certainly the most common in this study, but other goals such as EFF's category of citizenship are especially important to some learners. In the portion of the study that asked specifically about why each adult entered a program, a sequential string of goals was common. That full string of goals included "get a GED, go to college, get a better job, and help my children." Some people mentioned all of these, and some mentioned just a few. Those who only said, "get a GED," might have added some of the other goals had they been prompted by a simple "Why?" The teacher and each student should enter into a continuous dialogue that leads both of them to a better understanding of their goals.

Support 4: Encourage progress toward reaching goals. Since goals are important supports to persistence, adult students must make progress toward reaching their goals, and they must be able to measure their progress. Program services must be of sufficient quality that students make progress, and assessment procedures must be in place to allow students to measure their progress. Much of the recent interest in measuring student progress has arisen from the need to build systems of program accountability; yet helping students measure their own progress may entail tools and methods that are not appropriate for accountability purposes. On the one hand, accountability systems need measures that are easy to collect and quantify, even though such measures may not be useful to students and may be difficult to integrate into instruction. On the other hand, portfolio and authentic assessment approaches might be very useful in helping adults measure their own progress and can be an integral part of an instructional approach, although they may have weaknesses as the basis for an accountability system.

Further research should produce a hybrid assessment system that can serve both needs and can lead to certification of progress more often than is now the case in most programs. At present, most adults who enter ABE, ESOL, or GED programs will gain certification only if they pass the GED test or acquire a high school diploma. Program-level certification (in smaller increments) may be helpful to student morale, but state-level or even national certification of achievement measured in smaller increments of student progress may be more meaningful by providing a range of goal steps.

Library Literacy Programs. Little is known about student persistence in library literacy programs. Except for a few case studies of students in such programs,[52] most studies have focused on the integration of the literacy program into the library and on literacy collections. The study of student persistence in library literacy programs is complicated by the profession's philosophy, which values the privacy of patrons' records and open access. This philosophy makes library-based literacy programs wary of keeping records of student attendance, and it promotes the participation of students who might be turned away by other programs, especially students with very low levels of literacy.

---

[51] See National Institute for Literacy, 2000.

[52] See Cuban, 1999; Lyman, 1973.

VII. The Perspective of Adult Students

Statistics and research about student persistence provide only part of the picture. The LILAA persistence study, by including the life stories and direct voices of students in library literacy programs, will help make this picture come alive. Many adult students struggle with multiple life problems that make learning a long and challenging process, but they are motivated by the desire to improve their lives.

In Greensboro, North Carolina, for example, a Vietnamese-American student meets with an ESOL conversation club one night a week to "*make close friends with U.S. citizens and people from other countries,*" hoping that his "*life in the U.S. will be happier in the future.*" A student in Project READ at the Public Library in Redwood City, California, says: "*Before, I was limited by reading abilities. Now I have a dream of doing something. I'm an assistant teacher at my church, and I am currently studying to get my GED. Being able to pick up a newspaper or a magazine or to read my own words right now makes me confident. I wouldn't trade this for nothing in the world.*"

The library literacy programs in the LILAA persistence study strive to make a community for their adult students, a community in which students can persist until they reach their goals. An African-American woman who is studying in Oakland Public Library's Second Start program receives help from the staff with her everyday problems, including filling out government forms and finding a job. When talking about one of the staff members, she says: "*I thought I didn't have no friends. But she's a friend.*" In Greensboro, an African-American woman with a high school education who thinks that her basic skills are weak is attending a 12-week welfare-to-work program sponsored by the Greensboro Public Library. She, too, feels that the program is a family and that the staff deal with her as an individual: "*They allowed me to put my issues on the table and they helped me work through them.*"

Like Joe, who is quoted at the beginning of Chapter 1, many adult students face doubts about their learning. They often want to give up when they are frustrated with the whole process. Findings from the LILAA persistence study should provide insights toward understanding students' frustration, making the education process less intimidating, and enabling library literacy programs to identify and eliminate the barriers that keep adult students from persisting longer in their studies.

Chapter 3

Description of the LILAA Persistence Study

I. The LILAA Initiative and the Persistence Study

In 1996, the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds (WRDF) awarded grants totaling $4 million to 13 public libraries in California, Illinois, New York, and North Carolina. The grants helped these libraries strengthen their adult literacy curricula and instructional and assessment strategies and enhance their use of technology. In 1998, WRDF awarded an additional $542,000 in planning grants to 8 more public libraries as part of its effort to expand the program to 21 libraries nationally. New states included Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Ohio. Next, in 1999, WRDF awarded three-year implementation grants to 15 of these 21 programs to support persistence strategies. (See the Appendix for brief descriptions of 10 programs that were also awarded grants in 1999 but are not part of the LILAA persistence study.)

To reinforce its investment in library literacy programs, WRDF has also supported other strategies through partnerships with the American Library Association, the Illinois Literacy Resource Development Center, the University of Illinois Library Research Center, and the Urban Libraries Council. These strategies involve technical assistance, research, and publications and other communication activities.

To help the individual library literacy programs become more successful and contribute to the knowledge base of the adult literacy field, WDRF introduced a focus on student persistence. The LILAA persistence study is a systematic evaluation by outside researchers that will gather information about the challenges that adult students face and what it takes to keep them longer in literacy programs.

The primary goals of the study are to identify strategies that might improve student persistence and to assess whether the strategies make a difference when a program implements them. The strategies will be identified and implemented by program staff, and their effects on persistence will be evaluated by outside researchers. Important secondary goals of the study are to develop better measures of student persistence and to help the programs in the study implement these measures in their data systems.

A. The Research Team

The research team for the LILAA persistence study is composed of staff at the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization that is dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people and seeks to enhance the effectiveness of public policies and programs. The goals of NCSALL are to help the adult education field define a comprehensive research agenda and pursue basic and applied research under that agenda, to build partnerships between researchers and practitioners, and to disseminate research and best practices to practitioners, scholars, and policymakers. NCSALL is based at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education and is a collaborative effort that includes Rutgers University, the University of Tennessee, Portland State University, and World Education, which is a nonprofit agency based in Boston.

The research will include both qualitative analysis (conducted on-site in visits to the programs and discussions with staff and students) and quantitative analysis (based on program data routinely entered in enrollment and participation databases). NCSALL will have primary responsibility for the qualitative implementation research, and MDRC will conduct the analysis of quantitative data on participation and persistence. The two organizations will work as a single team, however, with both sets of researchers sharing input about each other's analytical work.

B. The Library Literacy Programs in the LILAA Persistence Study

The LILAA persistence study will evaluate persistence strategies implemented in the adult literacy programs of the five public libraries introduced in Chapter 1 and described fully in Chapter 5. In the *New York Public Library* system, the study focuses on three of the eight branches that house Centers for Reading and Writing (CRWs): Fordham and Wakefield in the Bronx, and Seward Park in Manhattan. In the *Queens Borough Public Library* system, also in New York City, the study focuses on three of the six branches that house Adult Learning Centers (ALCs): Central, Flushing, and Rochdale Village. In North Carolina, the *Greensboro Public Library* programs at the Chavis and Glenwood branches will be studied. In California, the study focuses on the *Oakland Public Library's* Second Start program and on the *Redwood City Public Library's* literacy program, Project READ.

These libraries house some of the best literacy programs in the country, and all have the resources and leadership needed to make changes that should support and improve student persistence. They are among the 30 percent of libraries that offer direct instruction, they are distributed across geographic regions, and they offer diverse perspectives on persistence in library literacy programs. Yet this sample is not intended to be representative, but, rather, to illustrate what *can* be done about student persistence when library literacy programs have sufficient resources and strong leadership.

II. Defining and Measuring Student Persistence

Historically, the concept of student persistence has not been defined precisely or comprehensively, and so an early goal of this study is to develop a clear and comprehensive understanding of this concept.

Thus far, the study's research has identified and focused on several aspects of student persistence, including the duration and frequency of students' participation in the programs and in literacy activities outside the programs, the students' progress toward their literacy goals, and the students' ability to overcome the obstacles and setbacks that keep them from achieving their goals.

The relative importance of each of these aspects of persistence on the overall problem is not uniform across the programs in the study. In some programs, for example, student persistence is challenged by a very long list of people waiting to be matched with a tutor. Some students might drop off the waiting list before enrolling in the program, but those who are eventually matched with a tutor tend to remain engaged for a long time. Even if students do stay in the program for years, however, some of them spend too little time in literacy activities in an average month to make much progress. In such programs, increasing students' *level of participation* may be the primary focus of persistence efforts.

In other programs, students begin instruction quickly and are engaged for many hours a week — participating in classes, using computers, and meeting with tutors — but they drop out if they have not made substantial progress after several months. In addition, tutors and teachers may leave the program, inducing some students to leave as well. In such cases, *the rate of retention,* rather than the level of participation, may be the key aspect of persistence to target.

In yet other programs, students may stay a long time and spend many hours, but they or their tutors may not work toward clear literacy goals and, therefore, may not make much progress. In that case, clear goal-setting and better structure may enhance the student's learning experience and, thus, persistence. That is, the *intensity and effectiveness of instruction* may be the key to improving persistence.

The definition of persistence, then, combines various elements of students' experiences in library literacy programs: the level of participation, the rate of retention, and the intensity and effectiveness of instruction. In addition, the study will focus on *barriers to participation* and how the programs address them. Each of these elements will be operationalized in a different measure of persistence.

Lacking a single common definition of persistence or a single program focus, measuring improvements in persistence is a complicated effort involving combinations of multiple variables and data sources. Thus far, four distinct sources of quantitative data have been identified that together may measure levels of persistence:

- *Demographic and initial enrollment data* can measure individual students' supports for barriers to participation and learning. These data will capture the extent of individual efforts and sacrifices. If the programs succeed in helping students overcome substantial barriers to sustained and intensive participation, they will increase these students' persistence. Similarly, if the programs help students better use their own resources and learning opportunities, persistence will be enhanced as well.

- *Data on program retention* (time spent in the program) will track how long students remain engaged in library literacy programs and any spells of nonactivity. Retention depends on the program's ability to help students make progress, to keep students interested over time, and to create a stable environment in terms of turnover among tutors and key staff. A variety of other factors may affect retention but are outside the program's control (such as students' child care, transportation, and health problems).

- *Data on hours spent and weekly (or monthly) activities* capture the "depth" of students' engagement with the program. Besides keeping students linked to the program for longer, improvements in the nature and quality of students' engagement with the program can increase persistence. Thus, persistence might be improved by having longer tutoring or computer sessions, doing more homework, reading more books, and generally making better use of the resources available.

- *An inventory of initial student goals and periodic updates* can also capture improvements in student persistence. Ultimately, an initiative that increases participation without bringing students closer to their literacy goals has only limited benefits. *An increase in student persistence should be manifested by increased goal attainment.* It is especially important to capture goal attainment when students exit the literacy programs, because increased persistence should result in a larger proportion of "positive" separations (that is, situations in which students have completed a course of study, reached a literacy goal, and are ready to move on to more advanced education activities).

III. Strategies and Interventions to Improve Student Persistence

Staff members at each of the five sites in the LILAA persistence study have identified four general strategies that they plan to implement with the aim of increasing student persistence: informational strategies, support strategies, operational strategies, and programmatic strategies. Table 3.1 summarizes the strategies that the five sites were planning to implement in the fall of 2000. The following sections briefly discuss each type of strategy and give examples of each.

A. Informational Strategies

For all the programs, an important first step in addressing the issue of student persistence is to discover the students' needs. All five sites have begun asking the students (and sometimes staff members and tutors) how the literacy programs can better support student persistence. Informational strategies include quantitative data collection (such as tracking students' participation records and demographic characteristics), focus groups, interviews, surveys, individual consultations, E-mail and Internet List Serves, and staff meetings to understand the needs of both students and tutors.

During the first half of 2000, for example, staff at Oakland Public Library's Second Start program conducted five focus groups with students and tutors, interviewed students who had left the program and then returned, and sent out a survey to all students and tutors. The staff compiled this information and discussed the results, finding few surprises. Students asked for longer program hours, more classes, and a shorter wait to be matched with a tutor — all of which the staff expected would be important to students. However, the research did produce two insights that may lead to new persistence strategies. First, students were more responsive than staff expected to the idea of a quarterly or semiannual reassessment of their literacy progress. Second, students asked for more family services, focused not only on literacy but also on such critical topics as violence prevention, nutrition, hygiene, and manners. Thus, Second Start's implementation of informational strategies both confirmed what staff already knew to be challenges to student persistence and suggested new program components that might be added to support persistence.

B. Support Strategies

As of September 2000, various support strategies were under consideration, but relatively few had been implemented because programs were polling students to learn which strategies would be most useful. Among the support strategies being considered were student-led stress-reduction classes and transportation vouchers. These support services were already in place at some of the library programs, and other programs were also interested in them. Such an exchange of ideas and experiences among programs is one of the goals of the LILAA initiative.

As part of a larger strategy to increase students' use of its computer resources, the Redwood City Public Library's Project READ offers preschool activities for the children of adult students. Finding space in the library is always a challenge for this program, and it has been particularly difficult to find space for child care. The program is attempting to address child care needs so that parents can use the computers, and adding children's software had helped in this effort. Project READ has traditionally focused on family literacy; offering services for children as a support strategy for parents' persistence in the program is a natural extension of this intergenerational focus.

The LILAA Persistence Study

Table 3.1

Reported Strategies for Improving Student Persistence in the LILAA Initiative

Strategy	New York Public Library	Greensboro Public Library	Redwood City Public Library	Queens Borough Public Library	Oakland Public Library
Informational Strategies					
Conduct student interviews, focus groups, or surveys	X	X	X	X	X
Learn from participation in national research project	X	X	X	X	X
Track and analyze student participation		X	X	X	X
Support Strategies					
Provide community service referrals	X		X	X	X
Provide support services (e.g., child care, transportation vouchers, or counseling)	X	X	X		X
Operational Strategies					
Review and implement new instructional technologies or increase access to existing technology	X	X	X	X	X
Increase office or instructional space		X	X	X	X
Increase service hours	X	X			X
Programmatic Strategies					
Improve tutor training	X		X	X	X
Implement or improve student orientation	X	X	X	X	X
Standardize description or definition of services offered	X	X	X	X	
Refine program management	X	X		X	X
Develop marketing or community outreach campaign	X	X	X	X	X
Develop student portfolios, showcase student work, or implement other incentives	X	X		X	
Establish and track student goals		X	X	X	X
Establish student advisory or support groups		X	X	X	X
Focus on students with learning disabilities			X		
Increase family literacy services			X		X

SOURCE: Library program reports to the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds, fall 2000.

NOTE: The absence of an "X" in a particular cell does not indicate that a site does not offer that program component but rather that the site does not focus on that component as a strategy to increase student persistence.

C. Operational Strategies

Most of the programs are considering such operational strategies as increasing the hours of operation, improving students' access to technology, and hiring staff. Two of the five sites have already extended the operating hours of their literacy centers. This strategy is easier to implement, of course, if a program is located in its own facilities rather than in a public building where operating hours may be less flexible.

The New York Public Library and Oakland's Second Start program both expanded their hours of operation to be more accessible to working students — an increasingly important consideration as more students move from welfare to work. The Fordham branch of the New York Public Library now offers Saturday hours, and library staff on-site will monitor student participation to determine whether persistence increases. Similarly, since January 2000, Oakland's Second Start program has operated three more nights per week.

D. Programmatic Strategies

Potential programmatic strategies to increase student persistence include making the curriculum more relevant, marketing other library services, recruiting students in innovative ways, and improving tutor training, student and program goal-setting, and student orientation.

Students may be unaware of the variety of library resources available to them outside the literacy program, such as help with tax preparation, access to the Internet, and various social and cultural events. The Greensboro Public Library has begun to develop a campaign that will market many such library opportunities to students and potential students. This campaign began with a community-wide effort called "Community of Readers," the goal of which is to increase both persistence rates and the use of library resources. While trying to improve persistence rates, however, staff at the library remain sensitive to the realities of students' lives; because emphasizing persistence has the potential to make some students feel guilty for not participating more intensively, staff are seeking to develop a marketing campaign that will not put negative pressure on students.

The Redwood City Public Library's Project READ is paying special attention to the problems of students who have learning disabilities or other special needs. During each student's initial assessment, staff ask a series of questions designed to discover learning challenges. A designated learning specialist subsequently discusses these challenges with the student's tutor, identifying teaching strategies and making recommendations for lesson plans. Project READ also closely monitors the progress of students after they have started to work with tutors, in order to identify and address learning difficulties as early as possible.

For many students, tutors represent the face of the literacy program. Most volunteer tutors in literacy programs do not have a professional background in literacy instruction, and they need training and ongoing support to provide high-quality instruction. Several programs in the study are seeking to increase both student and tutor persistence by improving their tutor training. For example, beginning in September 2000, the New York Public Library program has been redesigning its tutor-training process. One consultant was hired to assist in writing a new training manual, and another provides ongoing support to tutors in developing lesson plans and utilizing the library's technology resources.

The Queens Borough Public Library program is seeking to improve student persistence by making goal-setting an explicit part of the learning experience and by creating specific benchmarks based on the traditional school calendar. Ultimately, the program will be structured around modules of instruction, and students and tutors will be encouraged to focus on the completion of modules. Students will set literacy goals in the fall and will check on their progress toward goals several times during the year. They will also be encouraged to reenroll in the program for as many years as necessary — as long as they continue to set goals and work within the modules.

Orientation sessions for new students are another programmatic strategy to increase persistence. At Second Start in Oakland, orientations for students entering the program are planned and implemented by current students, whose participation in this activity increases their voice in setting the direction of programming. The New York Public Library program — in a departure from its former orientation, which provided only a lecture — plans to offer an orientation in the form of an open-house event attended by both potential students and potential tutors. Participants will be introduced to all of the program's library services and varied approaches to learning, and they will meet with experienced students and tutors and have the opportunity to discuss the program with them.

As of September 2000, the foregoing examples of persistence strategies (informational, support, operational, and programmatic) were in various stages of development and implementation. Several programs are already implementing such strategies, while others are still considering new approaches or planning their implementation. The programs are refining their methods and developing new ones based on what they learn from informational strategies and from the other programs in the study. Persistence strategies other than those summarized here will probably be implemented throughout 2001 and will be described in the next report.

IV. The Research Design

The LILAA persistence study uses a variety of research methods to address key questions. It relies on qualitative methods to describe the programs, students' experiences in them, the challenge of persistence, and programs' strategies for improving persistence. The qualitative research component, to be discussed more extensively below, depends on repeated and intensive site visits by researchers, allowing for in-depth observation of the workings of each program and in-depth conversations with all relevant stakeholders.

After the programs have identified strategies to improve persistence, qualitative methods will be used to analyze in detail how those strategies are implemented and how students and staff experience them. The qualitative research component will be complemented by a quantitative study of data collected as part of each program's management and operational activities. Such quantitative analysis is conducted mostly off-site, using data that programs periodically send to researchers. Although these data cannot capture as many details of the program operations and students' experiences as the intensive site visits can, the availability of data for many students over extended periods of time enables the research team to produce a detailed assessment of how student outcomes change as a result of the persistence strategies. Together, these research methods offer a strong lens for viewing persistence from multiple perspectives over time. The following sections discuss the specific designs of the quantitative and qualitative research components in more detail.

A. The Quantitative Research Component

The quantitative research team of the LILAA persistence study will assess the effects of strategies to improve student persistence by conducting a *cohort comparison study*; that is, the experiences of many entering students will be compared over time. As time passes and new persistence strategies are put in place, the experiences of entering students will change. Through statistical analysis, such changes can be attributed to the new program practices. For example, one question of interest is how students who entered the program before September 2000 (before new strategies and interventions were implemented) persist in the program in comparison with students who entered the program in early 2001 (after new practices were implemented).

By focusing on entering cohorts of students, the researchers hope to attribute changes in persistence to the strategies and interventions that the LILAA programs implemented. Attributing a change to a specific cause is a basic challenge of program evaluation and is made more difficult by changing contexts. It is fairly straightforward to collect data that describe how patterns of persistence change over time; but to correctly interpret those patterns, the study needs to establish what *would have happened* in the absence of changes, that is, if the programs had not tried to address student persistence at all.

This hypothetical state (what "would have happened") cannot be observed directly and is known as the *counterfactual.* In many traditional evaluations, such a counterfactual is created by using a research technique known as *random assignment*, whereby some of the people in the study sample are assigned to a program group (in this case, students in a library literacy program that uses enhanced persistence strategies), while another part of the sample is assigned to a control group (students who are not exposed to the strategies). In the LILAA persistence study, however, random assignment cannot be used, because — as the LILAA initiative changes the programs in their entirety — there is no preexisting counterfactual state to accommodate a control group. Therefore, all students in each literacy program will experience the changes as they occur. In this situation, researchers have to rely on *nonexperimental methods* to identify the effects of persistence strategies. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how changes in student persistence over time relate to implementation of the enhanced strategies.

The schematic (and hypothetical) Figure 3.1 illustrates this analytical problem. The solid line represents the relationship between time and student persistence in a library literacy program in the absence of strategies to improve persistence. Even without interventions, student persistence in this program increases slowly over time (it might also decrease or stay constant). At some point during the program's life, strategies are introduced to improve persistence (the start of the dashed line). From that point on, the dashed line describes the relationship between time and persistence, which is now steeper; persistence improves over time.

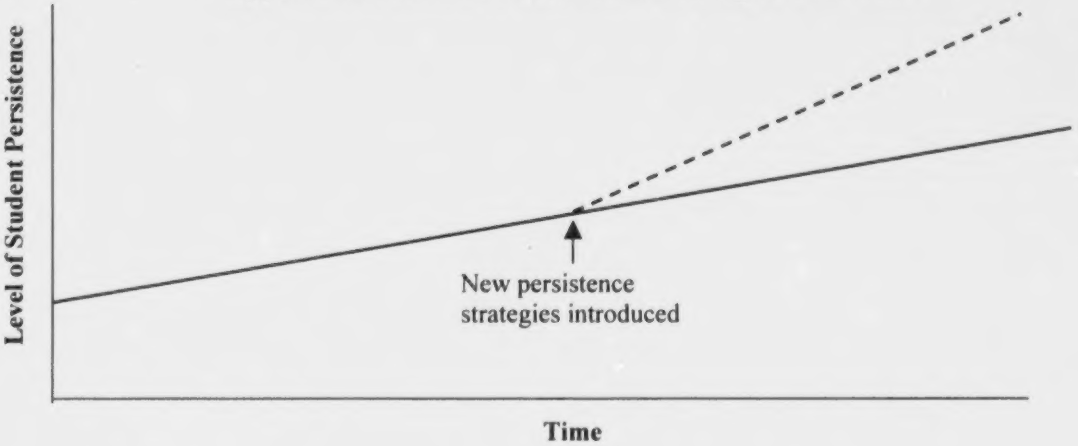
In this example, the new strategies paid off and increased student persistence *over and above* what would have happened anyway. Unfortunately, the part of the solid line to the right of the new strategies is not observed in real life; researchers cannot see what "would have happened" in the absence of the new strategies. The figure also illustrates that it is incorrect to attribute the entire increase in persistence over time to the new strategies, because persistence in this program was increasing already (in another program, it might have been going down over time). Gathering data on student persistence before the start of the study makes it possible to model the *expected* change in persistence over time using straightforward statistical methods. The *actual* change in persistence (as shown by the dashed line) can then be compared with this expected change, allowing researchers to correctly estimate the "effects" of the strategies employed by the various programs.

The Quantitative Methods. Two general types of statistical procedures will be used in the quantitative analyses. In-program outcomes (hours per week, periods of nonparticipation, etc.) — conducted both on the individual and on the aggregate program level — will be analyzed using *ordinary least squares regression analysis*, controlling for variation in individual characteristics over time and for variation in the program environment over time. The ordinary least squares estimates will be adjusted for clustering of observations over time (a problem known as "autocorrelation"). To study retention in the program — another important aspect of persistence — the research team will probably use *discrete-time hazard analysis*, also known as "survival analysis." Statistically, this is somewhat more complicated than simple ordinary least squares analysis, but both procedures are widely used, and results can easily be converted into tables and diagrams that a wide audience can understand.

The LILAA Persistence Study

Figure 3.1

Hypothetical Effects of Persistence Strategies Over Time



It is important to acknowledge the limitations of all these methodological approaches. First, the program enhancements to be implemented will probably not occur at the same time. Thus, the distinct break point shown in Figure 3.1 will be somewhat blurred in reality, which complicates the effort to attribute changes in persistence to specific program interventions.

Second, it cannot be ruled out that, during the study period, other events may occur that affect persistence among students in the library literacy programs. For example, during 2000, the Second Start program in Oakland moved to a new location, disrupting participation for a short while. If this had happened in 2001, it might have interfered with the ability to assess the effects of persistence strategies in the affected program. A more subtle example is that the composition of the student population served by the programs may change over time. This could happen, for example, as the programs grow or as they receive referrals from various agencies. To the extent that such changes are reflected in the average persistence of students in the programs, those changes could incorrectly be attributed to the persistence strategies. Fortunately, it is fairly easy to control for changes in students' average characteristics, provided that adequate demographic and baseline literacy data are available. However, to the extent that changes in individual characteristics are unmeasured, they could affect the quality of impact estimates relating to persistence.

A greater threat to the validity of inferences about the effects of persistence strategies is the possibility of more abrupt changes in the programs that coincide with the implementation of enhancements to improve persistence. For example, an abrupt change in funding from other sources could affect a program's facilities or instruction, which then could affect persistence indirectly. Or a program that is committed to improving persistence may experience setbacks relating to staff turnover, a shortage of tutors, or other internal or external pressures. Again, it may be difficult to separate the consequences of such problems from the benefits of enhancements to improve persistence. To offset this danger, the research team members who are engaged in quantitative research will work closely with the qualitative researchers, who are involved with the programs directly and whose implementation research will take account of important events and shifts in funding, recruitment, eligibility rules, and organizational procedures — even if those do not appear to be directly relevant to program policies to improve persistence.

Lastly, it is difficult for the programs to collect consistent and accurate data, which poses additional challenges to be addressed in the quantitative impact analysis.

The Systems for Collecting and Analyzing Quantitative Data. In order to measure changes in student persistence, the research team is gathering quantitative data on individual participation in the library literacy programs. Among the data collected are hours spent in one-on-one tutoring, hours spent in small-group tutoring, hours spent in class, hours spent using technology resources, and hours spent in other program or literacy-related activities. These participation measures are collected in databases at all five sites.

The New York Public Library and the Queens Borough Public Library both use the Adult Literacy Information and Evaluation System (ALIES) database. This system was developed by the Literacy Assistance Center for all New York State adult education programs, and it enables literacy programs to track and report on both student activities and fund-raising efforts. ALIES is based on Microsoft Access software, which permits these two libraries to exchange data with the research team in a format that is easy to read and process.

In the Redwood City Public Library's literacy program, Project READ, student participation information is collected in a different proprietary database system known as LiteracyPro. LiteracyPro Systems, a company whose founding members have traditionally had close ties to Project READ, developed this database. Though the company has grown and now provides databases to literacy programs throughout the country, Project READ remains close to its efforts and sometimes acts as a pilot site for new versions of the software. Project READ sends its participation and demographic data from the LiteracyPro system to the research team at MDRC, where the data files are converted into text files that can then be processed and analyzed using statistical software.

In the remaining two sites — the Greensboro Public Library and the Oakland Public Library — a new database system was designed to meet the specific needs of these two programs and the LILAA persistence study. Assisted by a Microsoft Access consultant, program and research staff worked together to create this database, which is now known as the Greensboro Oakland Adult Literacy System (GOALS). This system tracks students' participation in small-group and one-on-one tutoring, class attendance, computer use, and other literacy activities, and it also tracks their progress toward literacy goals. The Greensboro program is transitioning to GOALS from a paper data collection system, while staff at Oakland's Second Start program are exporting data from a LiteracyPro database that they had used earlier. Both programs are setting up systems to continuously and consistently enter participation data and pass it along to the research team.

Program data are transmitted to MDRC's regional office in California for processing and analysis. This involves combining different data elements and outcomes for individual students and building individual "histories" of enrollment, participation, goal pursuit and completion, and eventual exit from the program. Subsequently, these histories will be standardized across all students in a particular program, enabling researchers to examine how aggregate outcomes varied over time within each program. All this processing uses programming routines written in SAS, a statistical software package that is used by economists and other social science researchers.

B. The Qualitative Research Component

Although the project's quantitative research will yield reliable data about student persistence and about changes in persistence over time, quantitative data provide little context to help interpret the findings and increase their usefulness for program improvement. Toward that end, the study's qualitative research will give an in-depth look into persistence from the students' perspective and will be coordinated with the quantitative data. The qualitative research component will comprise in-depth assessments of

- students' education histories
- student persistence in the library literacy programs
- ways that the new persistence strategies affect outcomes

The qualitative assessments will proceed inductively: The research team will gather and analyze information to uncover insights about persistence, and those insights will then be tested through further data collection and analysis. Throughout the project, the researchers who focus on the qualitative component will work closely with those focused on the quantitative component to ensure that both teams learn from each other and that the final analysis fuses the insights of both two approaches.

The Structure of the Qualitative Component. The qualitative research component will employ a *grounded-theory approach*[53] based on ethnographic methods,[54] including observations of participants, interviews, documentary analysis, photography, focus groups, and Internet discussions. The idea behind this approach is to "ground" theories in what people say about their experiences and practices in order to discover the complex dimensions of people's inner and outer worlds.

The ethnographic methods will first produce narrative case studies of students, staff, programs, and communities. Analysis of the narrative case studies will then produce initial "themes" that describe student persistence and its patterns, the forces that are supporting or inhibiting persistence, and the relationship between programmatic interventions and persistence. These initial themes will then be tested as hypotheses by returning to the programs and students to continue interviews and observations that seek to validate or invalidate the initial themes. Eventually, final themes will emerge, along with a rich descriptive narrative of the students, staff, programs, and communities.

The first step in this process of discovering themes involved a review of the existing literature about student persistence in literacy programs. (Some of the literature is presented in Chapter 2.) This has provided the qualitative researchers with direction in selecting a research sample and drafting the initial research instruments. The research sample centers on students but also includes teachers, tutors, staff, programs, and the communities connected to them. The literature review pointed to education history, prior experience in literacy programs, and present program experience as important in understanding the phenomenon of student persistence. The literature will continuously be consulted for emerging themes about persistence, and the final report will expand the literature review. Age, educational attainment, first language, socioeconomic status, gender, and race were identified as demographic categories that might influence patterns of student persistence.[55]

---

[53] See Strauss and Corbin, 1990.

[54] See Spradley, 1979, 1980; Seidman, 1991.

The qualitative research will focus on the experiences of a "purposive" sample of students — one optimized for the purpose of the research — rather than on a representative or random sample. This sampling technique is meant to ensure representation of each type of informant who might provide useful insights. At the beginning of the study, the research team is making assumptions, based on their reading of the literature, as to which types of subjects to include. After each wave of data collection, the team will reconsider the sample and adjust it to ensure that every important point of view is included in the data — and this process will continue until the themes are fully developed.

The observation and interview instruments were designed based on the reading of the existing literature, the needs of participants in library literacy programs, and the results of pilot tests. The draft instruments were field-tested with adult students drawn from a program in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and in initial site visits to the programs. Draft instruments were then revised based on the initial field test and were used in a more extensive field test during the second round of site visits. The instruments will also be revised for the second and third years of data collection.

Collecting the Qualitative Data. During the first year of the study (1999-2000), the literature on student persistence was reviewed, pilot interviews of 17 students were conducted, staff members at each program were interviewed, each program was observed and described, and program documents were collected and analyzed. The pilot sample included students of various demographic backgrounds who had been in their programs for different periods: a little more than a month, three to six months, for at least a year, and two to three years. Students with regular and irregular attendance were included. This approach produced a balanced sample of students for the pilot interviews, and the sample will be expanded to at least 30 students in the next two data collection years. This is considered a good sample size for the development of themes in grounded-theory research.

The qualitative research depends on building rapport and trust between the research team and the staff and students in the programs. At an initial meeting in November 1999, program directors expressed their concerns about the research and were assured that it was not intended as an evaluation of a program's effectiveness. The research team explained that the study would be a collaborative effort; the researchers would be responsible for collecting and analyzing the data, while the program staff and students would be the source of the data and also would have an opportunity to critique the analysis and findings. The team has made an effort to explain and discuss the research with the program directors, staff, tutors, and students. During the first year, each program was given feedback about site visits, developing themes were discussed over the List Serve, and program staff were given assistance with their own research and data collection efforts.

In-person interviews with students during the first year were 60 to 90 minutes long. They began with questions about students' early educational experiences and continued chronologically up to their current experiences in the library literacy programs. Though the interviews focused on persistence, students were free to discuss issues that were important to them but that might not appear to be directly related to persistence. Biographical sketches of the students and transcribed summaries of the interviews were produced, and these were transferred into a grid that was used to code the data into themes.

---

[55] See Beder, 1991; Wikelund, Reder, and Hart-Landsberg, 1992; Tracy-Mumford, 1994; Quigley, 1997; and Comings, Parrella, and Soricone, 1999.

During the next phase of the research, interviews will be longer and will follow a three-part format developed by I. E. Seidman.[56] Over the course of a week, each student will participate in three interviews that focus on (1) biographical information, (2) the details of their present experience in the program, and (3) the meaning of that experience. This approach will provide a detailed narrative of each student's efforts to persist in learning and each student's point of view about the interventions the program is making to support persistence.

Program directors, staff, and tutors were interviewed in person and by telephone. Some program directors and staff are also participating in an Internet discussion about persistence, and some students have established their own Internet discussion, which sometimes focuses on issues related to persistence. Each program and its community, including service providers, has been observed and described. These methods of collecting qualitative data will be ongoing.

During the second and third years of the study, the research team may add new data collection methods, depending on the need to test the hypotheses that emerge from continuous data analysis. For example, home and workplace visits might be needed to discover and understand all the outside forces that either support or inhibit student persistence. Such visits might also provide insights into how students persist in learning through self-study or informal activities outside the programs.

Analyzing the Qualitative Data. Over the three years of data collection, the research team will engage in a thematic analysis that will lead to hypotheses about student persistence. Such hypotheses are developed by first identifying (from interviews and observational data) many individual factors that may influence persistence and then grouping these factors into categories and themes. The categories and themes will then be compared across the different cases to generate common themes that, when explored, can be developed into hypotheses about the relationship between persistence and the phenomenon described by each theme. Finally, the abstract themes will be linked to students' real stories and environmental conditions, providing a rich context from which to discover and better understand people's actions and the meanings they give to events.

As common themes and hypotheses emerge, they will be compared with the data collected from program documents, staff, and tutors. The research team will be looking for connections between what the programs do to support persistence and how the students describe those supports and the barriers to their own persistence. Case studies will assist in generating themes and illuminating students' narratives. Eventually, a story will emerge that describes how students persist in their learning and how the program strategies help or hinder them.

The qualitative data sources will include program literature, interview transcripts (and audiotapes), field notes, photographs, and Internet discussion transcripts. Two members of the research team will analyze the data together, to provide two points of view about any data that need interpretation. Researchers' notes on the analysis sessions will become part of the data. Emerging conclusions will be checked with students and program staff. These methods will lead to descriptions of the programs and their efforts to support student persistence, individual stories of student persistence, a list of hypotheses about persistence (including descriptions and examples of each), and an analysis of the links between program interventions and student persistence.

---

[56] See Seidman, 1991.

Chapter 4

Initial Common Themes from the LILAA Persistence Study

During the first year of the LILAA persistence study (1999-2000), members of the research team made several visits to each of the five sites' library literacy programs. They interviewed staff and students and observed program operations in order to (1) describe the planning process for interventions targeted at increasing student persistence; (2) identify individual, programmatic, and contextual forces that affect student persistence; and (3) lay the groundwork for better understanding how future persistence strategies may work. From data collected during these early visits, the research team has identified initial common themes that will be the basis for subsequent rounds of qualitative research.

These common themes tie together observations made across some or all of the five libraries' programs and provide a more integrated and comprehensive picture of potential determinants of student persistence than could be achieved by individual case studies of each of the programs. However, not all common themes are applicable to each program, and some of the themes discussed here may not be confirmed in subsequent rounds of data collection, from which new common themes may emerge.

A key purpose of organizing individual observations into common themes is that doing so reveals the multiple sides of what may otherwise appear to be straightforward and one-dimensional issues. A practical example of this can be found in exploring the theme of transportation. At first glance, distance and cost seem to be the obvious transportation-related barriers to student persistence, and both factors were frequently mentioned in interviews with students. However, other considerations also affect the travel patterns of students and tutors. For some, proximity to work led them to choose a particular program, but they changed jobs and now face a long commute to the program. Others study with tutors who feel unsafe going to the neighborhoods where students live. Although some of these concerns may be addressed through program strategies, such as transportation subsidies, others reflect larger issues (like job instability, neighborhood safety, and tutor matching) that programs may not be able to address successfully.

The themes presented below are classified into three categories: programmatic themes, instructional themes, and student-based themes. This classification is fluid, however, and some themes may straddle more than one category. As more data are collected, the themes become richer and deeper, and subthemes emerge. The presentation of the various themes centers on how important the issues involved are for student persistence. Each common theme provides an overview of a particular issue across the five libraries in the study, indicating the extent to which the issue is shared. The discussion then focuses on how the issue interacts with student persistence and how it affects the programs' ability to develop and implement persistence strategies.

I. Programmatic Themes

The library literacy programs in this study have common characteristics that may be important for student persistence. For example, they all appear to have stable leadership, access to technology, strong financial support, and relatively small student populations — features that allow them to offer a high level of individual attention to students. The research team also looked for common themes that describe differences among the programs that might have an impact on persistence. The position of these literacy programs within the larger organizational structure of a library has an impact on their operations, approaches to literacy, and strategies for increasing student persistence. The following sections discuss some of the programmatic themes that have emerged so far.

A. Integrating the Program into the Library

The extent to which the literacy programs are integrated into their affiliated libraries differs, and the programs are connected to the libraries in several ways. Each arrangement potentially has a different impact on the literacy program. In some cases, the program is a high priority for the library director and board; in other cases, however, library leadership may not view the program as a service that is central to the library's mission. While some literacy programs are integrated fully into the library's administrative operations, some are treated more as a separate project. Program services either take place within the library (as in the Redwood City, New York, and Greensboro Public Libraries) or are physically separate (as in the Oakland Public Library and several of the Queens Borough Public Library sites). When the program operates inside a library, its students, staff, and tutors have easy access to the library's books, computers, and other resources, including space. However, this also means that program hours are dictated by the operating hours of the library; that the normal noise and conversations of instruction may be disruptive; and that computers and other equipment, supplies, and books have to be shared and negotiated with other library departments and with patrons who are not considered adult students.

Some literacy programs in the study have a director who is a trained librarian, but others do not. This difference may affect the interaction between the literacy program and the rest of the library administration. As one staff member observed in an interview, a program director who is also a trained librarian may be better able than one who is not to negotiate for resources with the library leadership.

Even though the greater resources that might be available to a literacy program that is well integrated into its library provide support for interventions that can have a positive effect on student persistence, a high degree of integration into the library can also detract from the program's efforts. A library is a bureaucracy with its own principles and regulations, some of which can constrain a program's efforts to increase persistence; and in more-integrated programs, decisions concerning the literacy program can affect the library as a whole. In one program, for example, a proposal to provide daycare raised liability concerns (regarding child safety, accidents, etc.) that were more difficult to resolve within the bureaucracy of a large library than would have been the case in a smaller, self-contained program. A greater degree of autonomy would have allowed this literacy program to implement an intervention that might increase student persistence.

B. Respecting and Caring for Adult Students

Many students in the literacy programs in this study have experienced failure in formal education or, for other reasons, have a low degree of self-efficacy regarding education. Many of these adult students report traumatic life experiences that have affected their education, or they may be in a period of uncertain transition when they enter a literacy program. The caring and respectful environment and the individualized attention that the programs offer may be critical supports to persistence; and enhancing this supportive climate through community and socialization and student-centered programming may further improve persistence. Although the respect and care that the research team observed may not be unique to library literacy programs, they are apparent in this study's programs.

The library literacy programs in this study have fairly small student populations, ranging from 80 to 800 active participants at any time. This small size allows for the development of a supportive learning community. Even when the library literacy program is large, as it is in the Queens Borough Public Library, each branch's program is small enough to allow staff to provide individualized attention to students. Most instruction takes place in an informal atmosphere in small groups or in one-on-one tutoring sessions. The one-on-one and small-group formats allow instructors to focus on materials of interest to the students or materials that students have brought from home. Students are encouraged to express themselves, and most of the small groups that were observed across the five sites were lively and encouraged students to assert their opinions and draw on their experiences in their learning.

Most of these programs give students opportunities to lead and participate in the instructional process, to publish their writing, and to provide advice to the program. In Oakland, students are encouraged to participate in classes in art, yoga, and stress reduction. Students and staff members collaborate on programming decisions and advocate for other students. The Greensboro program has organized a student advisory board to participate in programming, and its English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students run small conversation groups, which are also attended by interested members of the community. At New York Public Library, student writing is published on the Web, and professional actors read it in annual events. In Queens, two student representatives call students and serve as advocates.

In subsequent visits to the programs, the research team will attempt to confirm the importance of this theme for student persistence and to identify changes in student involvement and the programs' supportive care that may improve student persistence.

C. Reflecting the Core Principles of Libraries

Library literacy programs reflect the core principles of libraries. Library literacy programs are different from other adult education providers in many ways, some of which have been discussed above. Some of the characteristics that make these programs special directly reflect the core principles of the larger library institutions of which they are a part. On the surface, this is often reflected in library literacy students' being addressed by program staff as "library patrons," "library users," and "learners"; such terms indicate that the literacy program has assimilated and reflects the principles of the library. Below the surface, the core principles of libraries affect who is being served in the literacy programs, how their participation is monitored and guided, and what types of activities students engage in.

Equal Access. Libraries operate on the principle of equal access for everyone in the community. This is possibly the most important principle affecting library literacy programs; it means that they do not have entry standards and, therefore, serve a wide variety of students ranging from those who are developmentally disabled to those who are ready to take the General Educational Development (GED) test, and from recent high school dropouts to senior citizens. The programs serve students who can spend many hours a week on their studies as well as students who may be employed or have other commitments and can spend only a few hours a month. Their openness to all patrons enables library literacy programs to admit students who are rejected or discouraged by other adult literacy programs, especially students whose literacy skills are far below most Adult Basic Education (ABE) students in the community.

This open-door policy has important implications for student persistence. By not extensively screening students, library literacy programs may enroll individuals who do not have the time or attention to focus on improving their literacy skills and may not stay in the program for long. Such students would have low persistence in any education program and, thus, may be difficult to help. However, there is another group of adult students who might drop out of other education programs for lack of sufficient progress or support but who can persist in the context of a library-based program that is open to everyone. For this reason, the need to diagnose and address special learning needs may be more important for persistence in library literacy programs than in other adult education settings. In addition to affecting the composition of the student population, the equal access and open-door policies of library literacy programs may affect the persistence of students after they have begun participating in the program. When entry and reentry into a program are easy, the consequences of dropping out may seem less severe than they might be in a more formal program with more restrictive application and admissions policies. In fact, one program in the study (the Queens Borough Public Library) is trying to increase student persistence by making itself look more like a traditional school, by introducing periodic assessments and tying curricula and assessments to a school-like calendar. Another program (Oakland) views students as "members" and does not pressure them with rigid requirements to attend classes.

Intellectual Freedom and Love of Reading. Intellectual freedom is another core principle of libraries. Besides the usual textbooks and educational software, library literacy programs encourage students to learn by using books and materials about any topic that interests them. Intellectual freedom advances another core principle of libraries: promoting the love of reading. Together, these two principles result in an emphasis on reading and publishing student writing, which is often treated as equal to the writing of known authors. Making literacy education interesting is one way in which library literacy programs may enhance student persistence — and also enrich the students' learning experiences during their time in the program. As part of the LILAA persistence study, the five sites continue to seek ways to make literacy curricula more relevant to students' daily lives, which may result in more engaged participation and increased persistence.

Privacy. Privacy is another core principle of libraries. Library patrons are not required to provide much personal information, and their reading interests and habits are not part of the public record. Some literacy students may be drawn to library programs, as opposed to adult schools or community colleges, because of concerns about privacy that stem from shame, problems with immigration status, or other reasons to remain anonymous. Because a library program is seen as a "safe" place, its students are more open with staff. Unfortunately, the emphasis on privacy can also complicate data collection and make it more difficult to monitor students' progress or needs, which may negatively impact a program's ability to improve student persistence. As part of the LILAA initiative, the five sites in the study are all expanding and improving their data systems, but concerns about privacy adhere to this process. In particular, demographic and employment data are not always collected and updated regularly, because program staff feel uncomfortable asking questions about personal matters. It also has proved difficult to get tutors to consistently report on student activities and progress.

II. Instructional Themes

The various methods that the library literacy programs use to teach reading, writing, and English are likely to have an impact on student persistence. All these programs work with adult students who have not been well served by more traditional educational institutions. As seen in the following instructional themes, the programs work to be innovative in meeting the unique needs of their students while also maintaining a somewhat traditional approach, in both curricula and assessment, to produce measurable learning gains. Students may be more likely to persist in literacy studies when the topics being taught are relevant to them, when the instruction is of high quality, and when the pace of instruction is appropriate for their reading level and ability to learn.

The instructional themes that emerged during the research team's initial site visits relate to curricula, assessment, technology, and volunteer tutors.

A. Curricula

The literacy programs in the LILAA persistence study are less structured than programs run by traditional adult education institutions, such as community colleges and GED programs. This allows for instruction based on individualized curricula chosen by the students and tutors. Some programs use thematic and project-based learning that builds curricula around students' concerns and lives, and other programs use student writing as the basis for curricula. Some tutors and students use materials produced by Literacy Volunteers of America, Laubach Literacy, and commercial publishers. Tutors combine these materials with curricula from other sources and modify them to meet the needs of their students.

Because library literacy programs were originally designed to encourage new readers, the library collection is often central to the program. The library collection exposes students to a wide range of topics and materials that might otherwise remain inaccessible. Students select books on subjects ranging from history and science to romance and sports. All the programs in the study have multicultural materials that are up to date and relevant to students' backgrounds, and these materials are popular for both instruction and practice.

On the one hand, a flexible and open curriculum that builds on the interests of the student conforms to adult education theory, which emphasizes contextual learning, and might thus support student persistence. On the other hand, if the curriculum lacks sufficient structure, it might not lead to learning gains, which might negatively affect persistence. Thematic curricula may provide the structure that tutors and students need to make progress but may not serve an individual student's immediate goals. The research team will look at how well defined curricula are in the different programs and at how changes in the structure and content of curricula affect student persistence.

B. Assessment

Formal assessment of student progress has not been common in most library-based literacy programs but is emerging as an area of concern. Some program staff feel that existing assessment tools are not appropriate for the types of learning that take place in their programs and for the low reading levels of many literary students. At the same time, staff acknowledge the importance of knowing how students are progressing and how they do compared with one another and compared with students in other programs. The lack of formal assessment systems limits the programs' ability to assess student progress and also makes it difficult for them to participate in federally funded programs that require standardized assessments at periodic intervals.

Some programs in the study have developed approaches to assessment that match their unique instructional orientation and curricula. The Redwood City Public Library uses the Bader Reading and Language Inventory[57] and reassesses students every six months. Most of the other programs depend on evaluations by tutors or portfolios of student work and staff observations as ways to assess student progress. However, tutors sometimes do not complete the evaluations, and some programs find it difficult to perform the administrative tasks required for maintaining portfolios. Staff observations sometimes focus on students' behavior rather than achievement.

---

[57] This is a flexible battery of tests designed to quickly screen children, teens, and adult students in a nonthreatening manner. It was developed by Lois A. Bader at Michigan State University and is published by Prentice-Hall. For details, see http://vig.prenhall.com.

Assessment may not support persistence if students and tutors are anxious about being judged. On the other hand, evidence of progress may be important for maintaining student motivation and developing appropriate curricula and may thereby enhance persistence. As programs consider the use of periodic assessments and standardized tests, the research team will continue to monitor the issues relating to this theme. Whether assessments are done, how they are done, and how the results are being used may all affect how students respond and whether their persistence is affected.

C. Technology

The library literacy programs in the persistence study have more computers than most other adult literacy programs. Software is used to supplement tutoring, and students who use computerized instruction usually work alone, perhaps wearing a headset, but sometimes work in pairs with a tutor. Students are using the computers to learn keyboarding, to practice specific reading or vocabulary skills, to input what they first write by hand, to write on-screen, and to look up information on the Internet. Popular software includes Rosetta Stone, English Discoveries, and Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing as well as various phonics software programs. Internet access is available in most of the computer labs, but in some it is limited to only a few computers. The literacy programs in this study encounter the typical problems of maintaining and using computers: insufficient technical support, incompatible hardware and software, the need to assist or guide students, and the labor-intensive tasks of monitoring a computer lab.

The privacy and repetitive functions of a computer, the confidence of being able to master basic computer skills, and the feeling of being in control of the learning pace may give students a sense of accomplishment and success, which can be a powerful support to persistence. Computers that are clustered in a lab also invite students to work together and help one another; such peer tutoring is popular in several of the programs.

Although the availability of computers probably enhances student persistence, technology-based instruction has potential drawbacks. Some students reach a point of frustration after they have learned the basics of computers and as their low literacy skills begin to constrain what they can do with them. Some students find that working with the same software, though comfortable, is boring and is not intellectually challenging. At that point, the computer can become an impediment to persistence, rather than a support.

Another challenge confronted by programs that use computers to supplement tutoring and classroom instruction is the problem of monitoring students' computer use. Staff and tutors would like to track this potentially important aspect of participation, and they can use information about computer use to develop better curricula and to purchase and recommend appropriate software. Some of the programs use sign-in sheets to monitor computer activities, while others are still developing procedures for this. The challenge is not just to assess whether students are using computers and for how long but also to learn what software they are using and how much progress they are making.

D. Volunteer Tutors

Library literacy programs rely on volunteer tutors for most of the instruction they provide. Although volunteers are highly motivated, most of them are not trained as teachers, and the quality of their instruction is inconsistent. Yet tutors can be creative in ways that professional classroom teachers cannot. They serve only one or a few students and so can tailor their teaching techniques to those students' needs and comfort level. They also can act as advocates for students and help them access other support services in the community.

Although close relationships with tutors are believed to help students persist in their literacy studies, one-to-one relationships can also threaten persistence when either the tutor or the student leaves the program. A student who loses a tutor may experience a waiting period before being matched to the next tutor, and the two may need time to build rapport in their new relationship. Similarly, a tutor who loses a student may become disillusioned and leave the program, resulting in one less tutor to serve new students. Some tutors and students may also have difficulty separating when it is time for the student to advance to the next educational goal.

The tutors in the programs in this study are provided with orientation and training but still sometimes feel unprepared to manage instruction. Their limited in-service training and support lead some tutors to rely on workbooks, grammar lessons, and other traditional forms of instruction. To address these issues, the programs try to arrange professional development activities for tutors, but this proves difficult because staff and tutors have limited time. Even when programs develop creative approaches to instruction, they sometimes lack the resources to train and support tutors in using the new methods.

Given the potential shortcomings of one-to-one tutoring, some programs are moving to small-group tutoring. This change allows a program to operate with fewer tutors, so it can be more selective and better train and support them. To the extent that such a shift leads to better instruction, it should enhance both students' persistence and the learning experience. Working in small groups can also help provide continuity when the program loses a student or even a tutor; the remaining group members might support each other, possibly making the transition less disruptive. On the other hand, small-group instruction reduces the amount of individualized attention that students get — especially if they are at different literacy levels — which could affect the persistence of students who particularly need one-on-one attention.

Several programs in the persistence study do not have enough tutors, resulting in a waiting list of students seeking services. A long wait can cause potential students to drop out even before they begin instruction. Some programs use their intake and orientation process to weed out individuals who may not yet be committed to literacy instruction. Programs also use computer-aided instruction to give potential students a way to start learning, while they are waiting to be matched to a tutor. Since spaces for new students are limited, the waiting period and initial computer use might be appropriate ways to identify students who are most likely to persist after they enter a tutoring relationship.

A serious problem relating to tutors and student persistence is the lack of consistent reporting of tutoring activities and student progress. Although every program that uses tutors has some type of reporting system to capture tutoring activities, several programs have had difficulties getting tutors to complete periodic reports. Without regular reporting, program staff cannot monitor student participation and cannot address persistence problems until it may be too late. Having acknowledged this, most of the programs now include strict guidelines in their tutor training about recording and reporting tutoring activities. Programs are also developing new procedures to make it more convenient for tutors to file reports — for example, by using E-mail.

III. Student-Based Themes

The students in these library literacy programs are diverse in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, country of birth, prior educational experience, income, occupation, living situation, health, and educational goals. Some of the following themes may relate particularly to specific groups, and the research team will explore such relationships through ongoing data collection and analysis. Some personal and cultural characteristics and circumstances probably do affect student persistence, and so the programs are developing strategies that are sensitive to individual experiences, cultural backgrounds, challenges, and strengths.

A. Disabilities

Several adult literacy students who were interviewed reported that they had been identified as learning disabled during their early schooling, and some students appear to be affected by developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, mental illness, or recovery from addiction. Some learning-disabled students — those with very low literacy skills — are referred to library literacy programs by other adult education providers in state-funded systems. Program directors, students, and other adult education agencies confirmed that library literacy programs are often seen as the last resort for such students, whose disabilities may both explain why they failed in school and be a barrier to progress and persistence in a library literacy program. Yet library programs also offer learning environments that are supportive of such students and give them an opportunity to gain confidence in their ability to learn and to express themselves — and, possibly, prepare them to be "mainstreamed" into other educational and work settings. Library literacy programs may thus provide an important service, even without substantially (or measurably) increasing these students' literacy skills. The research team will continue to study issues related to learning disabilities and the effects that particular persistence strategies might have on students with learning disabilities.

B. Cultural and Personal Identity

The library literacy programs in the persistence study value the cultural and personal identity of their students. The programs have multicultural materials and encourage student writing that focuses on culture. ESOL programs encourage students to discuss and write about their native culture, and the students are sometimes the source of cultural knowledge for others in the program or in the larger library community. The emphasis on cultural identity may help students view the library literacy program as a place where they belong, and this sense of belonging may be very important for the persistence of students who have been disenfranchised by other educational institutions. The research team will continue to explore how cultural identity interacts with program efforts to enhance students' learning experiences and persistence.

C. Sponsors

Most students who were interviewed identified a "sponsor" who encouraged them to enter the program or who helps them persist in their studies. Some sponsors are people from the past; one student referred to his mother's help when he was a schoolchild, and he feels that he is still supported by her sponsorship. Students also refer to contemporary friends and family members as sponsors who helped them enter the program and who continue to support their persistence. In some cases, program tutors or staff members are identified as sponsors. Continuing research efforts will focus on the role of sponsors in students' lives, the ways in which sponsors support persistence, and how the library literacy programs attempt to involve sponsors in their efforts to improve student persistence.[58]

D. Personal Goals

Students in the study appear to have two main types of goals: (1) large, transformational goals and (2) goals that are more limited and immediate. On the one hand, students want to make a big change in their lives — a change that might be related to their immigrant status, for example, or to the desire to get a job, increase their income, recover from substance abuse, escape from a destructive relationship, or in general improve themselves. On the other hand, a student may need to pass a certification test for a job or may need help using specific printed materials. Educational activities that serve both types of goals — that focus on both short-term milestones and long-term objectives — may increase student persistence, because they address an immediate need and also reinforce a longer-range vision.

As part of the effort to increase student persistence, several programs in the study have identified the setting and monitoring of goals as a potential focal point. The research team will follow such efforts and will attempt to establish whether an increased emphasis on personal goals and progress has positive effects on student persistence.

IV. Summary

Student persistence is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon shaped by a variety of forces and circumstances that operate at the program level and in the lives of individual students. Once identified, these forces offer opportunities for program interventions to improve student persistence. The research presented in this chapter identified specific constraints and barriers to persistence that services can be designed to address. It also identified program characteristics that might enhance or interfere with persistence. Mostly, however, the themes presented here show that there is no single approach to improving persistence that will work in every program environment and for every type of student served by library literacy programs.

The three groups of themes presented in this chapter identify three broad areas of potential program intervention. The first group — the programmatic themes — concerns operational and cultural aspects of the library literacy programs. The way library programs are structured and run enables them to serve adult students who otherwise would have difficulty finding an appropriate program to help them improve their literacy skills. Library literacy programs can serve students with very low literacy levels, students with many competing demands on their time, and students who do not respond well to traditional classrooms, course schedules, tests, and the like. However, the open and flexible structure that makes library literacy programs attractive to many adult students can also make it difficult to encourage and monitor student persistence. As a result, interventions to improve persistence must strike a balance between maintaining the programs' accessibility, convenience, and low-key profile and advancing their quest for greater persistence, achievement, and goal attainment. Program enhancements that are likely to improve student persistence include longer and more convenient operating hours, better data systems, and new activities that strengthen the ties between the programs and their students.

---

[58] See Brandt, 1998.

The second group of themes — the instructional themes — defines another potential area of program intervention to enhance student persistence. Library literacy programs may offer more flexibile curricula than other literacy programs, and individual students and tutors often have greater freedom in choosing relevant learning materials, which should enhance student interest and persistence. The programs in this study also have extensive computer resources, enabling students to work on their own to supplement their work in classes or with tutors. Students also can use computers while they are waiting to be matched with a tutor. For much of their instruction, the programs in this study rely on volunteer tutors, who can establish meaningful and lasting relationships with individual students and can tailor instruction to their personal needs.

All of this means that library literacy programs are well equipped to respond to the diverse instructional needs of individual students, which should increase student commitment and persistence. However, it also means that library literacy programs relinquish some control over the content and structure of the instruction that students receive, which, in turn, may complicate program efforts to improve student persistence and progress by enhancing the quality of instruction.

Several of the programs in this study have targeted instruction as a key area of program improvement. For example, shifts from one-on-one tutoring to small-group tutoring are being considered. Such a shift reduces the total number of tutors who are needed to serve a given number of students, which may shorten waiting lists and may increase the amount of support, training, and monitoring that the program can provide to each tutor. Another component of instruction that has received much attention is the use of periodic assessments to monitor student progress and to give students and tutors timely feedback.

The third group of themes discussed in this chapter — student-based themes — focus on the differences across groups of students and the importance of such differences for student persistence. Ranging from learning disabilities and other special needs to cultural assets, sponsors, and individual goals, students' individual characteristics have the potential to affect their persistence greatly, in both positive and negative ways. Several of the programs are targeting these positive or negative forces in order to increase the value of their services for diverse groups of students and to improve attachment to the program and persistence for all students.

Chapter 5

Case Studies: The Sites in the LILAA Persistence Study

The initial common themes outlined in Chapter 4 were developed during visits to the five libraries operating adult literacy programs in the LILAA persistence study. The site visits were conducted during late 1999 and 2000, and the following case studies present snapshots of the programs during that time period. The programs are continuously developing and implementing new persistence strategies, however, and subsequent reports will detail changes in the programs and the impacts of those changes on student persistence.

I. New York Public Library

The New York Public Library (NYPL) is known worldwide for its extensive collection, which serves scholars in every academic discipline. Since the nineteenth century, the Seward Park branch on the Lower East Side and the Aguilar branch in Spanish Harlem have been two important institutions for helping immigrants assimilate into life in the United States. Immigrants still come to the NYPL neighborhood branches for English instruction, preparation to pass the citizenship test, and reading materials in their own language.

Although the NYPL's literacy student population still includes immigrants, the focus now is on literacy for English-speaking adults. The library literacy program primarily serves adults who were not successful in other literacy programs because their reading skills are too low. Since many of these students belong to ethnic minority groups, the programs emphasize the use of multicultural materials. Most of the adults who seek out services are African-Americans or English-speaking immigrants who have recently arrived in the United States, and the ethnicity of the staff reflects that of the students.

The NYPL provides adult literacy services through the Centers for Reading and Writing (CRWs) at nine of its 85 branches. The CRWs are located in three of New York's five boroughs. One is on Staten Island, four are in Manhattan, and four are in the Bronx. Most CRWs provide small-group instruction that is led by volunteer tutors. The New York City Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI), which is sponsored by the Mayor's Office for Adult Literacy, is the primary funding agency for these services, and NYCALI specifically funds libraries to serve adults at the lowest levels of reading skill. Support from private funders has provided the CRWs with computers to augment the tutoring services. Five full-time administrative staff support the CRWs, which serve approximately 1,000 adults each year. The LILAA persistence study is focused on the three CRWs that are housed at the Fordham, Wakefield, and Seward Park branch libraries.

The *Fordham* branch library is in a thriving and energetic business district of the Bronx. The neighborhood is filled with small stores and street vendors selling food and other goods from many countries. Children play in front of the library after school, and adults walk up and down the street or gather in front of the library at all hours. Bus routes to the building operate until 10 PM, which helps make this branch accessible to patrons.

To get to the CRW at the Fordham branch, a student enters the library, passes the first-floor reference area and its new computers, takes the stairs to the second floor, and passes through the children's area to the back of the building. One side of the hallway is decorated with a collage of photos and student writing on colorful paper, and the other side is decorated with posters depicting historical events. The main room of the CRW contains a newly installed computer lab with five flat-screen monitors and seven standard ones arranged so that students can share information as they study and practice. Behind the computer lab is a larger administrative office that houses the file cabinets and workspace of the staff and a small "break room" where students often gather to eat and talk. The CRW expands into other areas of the library to offer small-group instruction in the children's room and in a small classroom area.

A staff member teaches an Internet class that introduces students to keyboarding, and all students in this class receive an address for Hotmail (a free E-mail service provided by Microsoft). Students sit at the computers during the day quietly pronouncing new vocabulary, entering text, practicing keyboarding, and exploring Web sites. The computers provide a way for students to extend their learning beyond their small groups.

The program serves 150 students. Most hear about the program through word of mouth, though the staff do some outreach to recruit new students. The staff consist of a site advisor, a computer assistant, a literacy assistant, and volunteers.

Most of the tutors in the program are from the Bronx. They work during the day and tutor in the evening, and most are committed to staying with the program for at least several years; on average, they stay for five to six years. Each tutoring group has a designated reading level and includes between five and ten students who sit around tables for instruction and discussion. When a tutor is absent, two groups are sometimes combined. Though most groups meet at the library, one tutor conducts a class at home on weekends. Sometimes the small groups interact like close friends having a lively conversation, with all the students engaged in an active discussion. At other times, each student works independently while the tutor moves from one student to another.

The *Wakefield* branch, which houses one of the CRWs, is located in an urban residential neighborhood in the Bronx. Most of its students are Afro-Caribbean adults. The red brick building is a small neighborhood library, and many of the students live near enough to walk to their classes. To get to the CRW, the students pass a security guard and down a flight of stairs to the basement. Staff members have a small office, and across from that is an area where food and drinks are served during class breaks.

The main room of the CRW houses five or six small round tables at which students crowd for group tutoring sessions. Some tables hold folders that contain job application forms and other materials. Book collections surround the students as they work, and display racks are filled with books-on-tape. A population map hangs on one wall of the center, and on another wall a computer-generated banner reads, "Get that job — resource books." Near the entryway is a computer lab. Most tutoring sessions are in the evening; during the day, students study alone or in pairs at the tables or in the computer lab.

The CRW at the Wakefield branch has Afro-Caribbean staff members who mirror the Afro-Caribbean ethnicity of the students. The program uses materials and curricula that reflect students' cultures and interests in such practical matters as employment, taxation, and health. The two professional staff and 16 volunteers serve 100 adults, who attend classes twice a week at various hours. The site advisor — a former schoolteacher and administrator — has published theme-based learning materials focused on health and taxes and is currently designing a job development curriculum.

The *Seward Park* branch is located in Manhattan, on the Lower East Side, near Chinatown. At the turn of the twentieth century, the library primarily served Jewish immigrants. Though the ethnic makeup of the neighborhood has changed, many orthodox Jewish families still live there.

The library now has an extensive collection of materials and books in Chinese for its new patrons. A growing Puerto Rican community surrounds the library as well.

To reach the program, students climb a steep stairway past the children's area to another steep stairway and up that to a bright room filled with plants. At the entrance to the CRW is a column labeled "Milestones" that celebrates the accomplishments of students and was adopted from another literacy program the site manager visited. The room has a scholarly, classic atmosphere. On one side is a computer area, while on the other side are tables for tutoring. Surrounding this large sunny space is a multicultural book collection. The program serves 80 students who gather in small groups around tables. The site advisor and staff work in a former reference area for librarians.

A. Strengths and Challenges

The three CRWs of the New York Public Library system each offer a small, supportive community for learning, and all include staff members who are ethnically similar to the populations they serve. The centers have adequate computer resources and extensive collections of materials that are of interest to their students. Tutors are encouraged to use, and are assisted with, multicultural materials and curricula that allow students to focus on themes that are relevant to them. The programs provide a mix of structured small-group instruction and informal self-study, and tutors are available for assistance. All the programs emphasize reading, and students use writing to describe their lives and express their opinions.

Except for the Fordham branch, which needs more space, the CRWs could accommodate more students and tutors. The programs are trying to increase their Adult Basic Education (ABE) populations and fill empty seats through outreach campaigns. The programs are also short of staff, but hiring procedures are slow. Current staff members need more time to focus on developing their programs, and the programs need additional staff so that they can operate for more hours.

B. Strategies to Increase Persistence

Informational Strategies. In early 2000, students, tutors, and staff of the NYPL programs engaged in workshops and meetings across sites to discuss issues that relate to student persistence. The programs have decided that they should focus on improving services and work toward more-uniform services. Transportation, low self-confidence, and the demands of family life were identified as the major barriers to student persistence.

Support Strategies. Transportation subsidies were considered by the NYPL program, but staff could not decide how best to identify students who should receive the subsidies; until this can be resolved, transportation subsidies will not be used as a support strategy. Child care was identified as a way to help students handle the demands of family life, but implementation is prohibitively complicated and difficult because of licensing, liability, and cost. To help students with these and other barriers to persistence, the NYPL will add information on community resources to each CRW Web site. The program will also use college mentors as persistence coordinators to help put support strategies into practice.

Programmatic and Operational Strategies. Over the course of the LILAA persistence study, the NYPL will develop better-organized and standardized approaches to orientation, tutor training, and the use of technology in instruction. Orientation will be provided as an open-house event that demonstrates what the program can offer and allows potential students to meet tutors. This format is a change from the previous approach, which provided only a lecture. Tutor training will be standardized to ensure high-quality instruction and will be based on such approaches as one called LitStart. The CRWs will experiment with multimedia approaches to instruction that use products developed by groups such as the Adult Literacy Media Alliance (ALMA), and they will increase training of tutors in the use of multimedia and technology. The program will also evaluate software packages and develop an annotated bibliography of software. The CRWs will be open longer during the week and on Saturdays, and some CRWs will add daytime computer hours to attract ESOL students. In order to attract more ABE students, the program will undertake an outreach campaign.

C. A Student's Story

Joe appears young at 32 and comes across as "tough." He was born in Puerto Rico but moved to New York when he was 2. He lives with his mother and two siblings, both of whom are at least 10 years younger than he is and one of whom has already dropped out of school. Joe wants to "stand tall and be independent in the world." Believing that his commitment to learning will help him realize his dreams, he has persisted in his studies for two years. He walks to the library and often arrives before class begins so that he can use the Internet to check out the latest information on wrestling.

Joe is working with his third tutor. The first one was an artist, who left because of the demands of her career. He worked with his second tutor for a year and found her helpful, but she moved to Florida; they still keep in touch through E-mail. When Joe was matched with his third tutor, he joined a new group in which he is the only male student. Although he misses the male camaraderie of his former group, he enjoys talking with the women, who are older than he, in this new group. In general he is proud of his progress in reading and writing, and his portfolio is filled with stories about his life. However, he is not sure that the program is helping him prepare to achieve his two goals: to pass the GED test and the test for a driver's license.

Despite Joe's concerns about the literacy program and his slow progress toward his goals, he is persisting in his learning. As he puts it:

> *I don't know what made me hang in there. I don't know what went through my head to stay, but I didn't do it for nobody here. I did it for myself because I know once I walk out that door, I'm gonna regret it. I'll wind up coming back again.*

II. Greensboro Public Library

The Greensboro Public Library in Guilford County, North Carolina, is an important player in a local initiative, Community of Readers, that brings the entire community together to solve the literacy problems of adults and children. This effort started with an 18-month study that produced a report, *Literacy 2000.* The study found that the lack of resources and an inadequate support system for literacy, as well as personal issues that affect students' ability to learn, contribute to Greensboro's literacy problems. The study informed the creation of the initiative now called Literacy 2000, which has evolved into a politically active coalition; its goal is the development and implementation of a long-term strategy to serve Greensboro's low-literate residents through community, social service, and literacy agencies. Literacy 2000 is supported by the Greensboro Public Library, Reading Connections (a nonprofit agency that provides volunteer tutoring and a literacy hotline), Guilford Technical Community College (the largest provider of adult education services in the county), and many other community agencies in the county that serve adults and children.

The Greensboro Public Library supports literacy programs in two of its nine branches, Glenwood and Chavis. These two programs offer basic literacy, computer-assisted learning, ESOL, and pre-GED services to native-born and immigrant residents of Greensboro. The programs operate Monday through Saturday, in both the day and the evening. A neighborly, community atmosphere characterizes these literacy programs, which are supported through the library's operating budget and private funding.

The *Chavis* branch serves a predominantly African-American community, and the program is called Lifelong Learning because it works with both children and adults; it offers an extensive adult literacy collection and computer lab. Every week, two teachers from the local community college teach afternoon and evening GED and adult literacy classes. The computer lab provides instruction in, and access to, word-processing and E-mail. The library has formed a partnership with a welfare-to-work program to provide literacy instruction through community leadership and empowerment for groups of 18 to 24 participants in 12-week sessions that include employment. This program supports leadership development in its students by focusing on critical thinking, confidence-building, and community activism.

The *Glenwood* branch is in a working-class neighborhood that has attracted refugees and immigrants from all over the world. The library is housed in a modern, sunny building and is a source of pride to the community. The program offers small-group English language instruction, a woman's literacy class, a citizenship class, a computer lab, and a collection of multicultural reading materials.

On a typical day, students are involved in a great variety of activities: The members of an ESOL Conversation Club are exchanging stories with native Greensboro residents in a group that is facilitated by AmeriCorps members; a student is reading a newspaper with her tutor in the adult literacy and multicultural materials area and then will work with Rosetta Stone, a software program, in the computer lab; a woman is tutoring a student who is a Mexican physician studying for her certification exam; Reading Connections tutors and their students are reviewing materials prepared by Literacy Volunteers of America; an immigrant student is delivering a book report about her country and culture to local schoolchildren; two Asian women and an African man are learning basic English in a small classroom; and a short-term family literacy program — funded by the local Junior League — is operating in the children's room.

Staff members of the Greenboro literacy programs are integrated into the library. For example, the learning coordinator for the literacy program in one branch also works at the reference desk and checks out books to library patrons. The literacy program, therefore, is almost indistinguishable from regular library services. The program attracts people who otherwise might never use the library, and it brings the library into contact with community groups that support literacy students in other ways. This sometimes increases the students' level of civic activity. For example, ESOL students from the Glenwood branch went to the state capital in Raleigh along with members of the Friends of the Library to lobby for recent state library legislation.

When students first contact the program, they are asked to fill out a registration form that collects basic demographic information and asks for a time when they can attend a student orientation. At the orientation, a small group of potential students is given a tour and general information about the program, and each fills out a goals worksheet, receives a library card, and is assessed to determine literacy skills and English proficiency. Potential students are encouraged to become involved in classes and other forms of learning while waiting to be matched with a tutor. After they begin work with a tutor, students are given an optional computer-based assessment, and their progress is monitored through quarterly interviews and portfolios of their work. All the classes that a student attends are recorded on a time sheet, and this information provides a monthly report on each student's participation.

A. Strengths and Challenges

Literacy 2000 shows that Greensboro is a community that is willing to engage in the uphill battle of solving its literacy problems as a team effort. One strength of the Greensboro program is its receptiveness and openness to the changing needs of the community. Services in this program often develop organically and spontaneously. For example, the ESOL Conversation Club was established in response to both the needs of ESOL students for English language practice and the needs of retired library patrons for human interaction. Another example is the expansion of the library's Spanish language collection in order to meet the needs of the growing Hispanic community. One of the library staff recently went to Mexico to select books at an international book fair. The Chavis program for low-income women addresses their needs for literacy, employment, and community leadership skills; it was developed in response to the 1996 welfare reform legislation.

The Greensboro Public Library's flexibility and creativity have led to a wide range of services that meet the needs of many types of students, and the program's challenges arise from problems that are common to small-town communities in southern states: Incomes are low; the effects of racial segregation linger; there are few social services to support literacy students; and public transportation is limited. Furthermore, library literacy programs in North Carolina do not receive state funding, because all funds earmarked for literacy are channeled through the community college system. Therefore, the Greensboro program is financially supported only by the library and private sources. Recording attendance and student progress is a new activity, and the few staff members are finding this responsibility to be labor-intensive and time-consuming. The program depends on AmeriCorps members to assist with this work, but they often leave the program just as they are trained and experienced, because the AmeriCorps program lasts for one year. In addition, lack of access to computer equipment has made it difficult to create reports using the persistence study's GOALS database (see Chapter 3).

B. Strategies to Increase Persistence

Informational Strategies. The Greensboro Public Library has undertaken a number of informational strategies to learn about the needs of both students and tutors in its programs. The Glenwood branch is changing its intake forms to include more information about students' educational backgrounds and an informal assessment of their skills. This information is entered and tracked with the GOALS database. Student profiles will be developed based on the information from intake forms and from focus groups and interviews about the barriers and supports to student persistence. Program staff have begun making phone calls to students who stop attending tutoring sessions, in order to learn why they left the program. Staff members are also holding regular meetings with active students to get their perspective on what causes a student to drop out or persist in the program. For example, a focus group of participants in the ESOL Conversation Club identified transportation, feeling shy, health problems, and trouble speaking English as barriers to persistence.

Greensboro Public Library staff members are also conducting focus groups with tutors. In these groups, although tutors expressed interest in workshops to improve their teaching methods, they were not interested in learning about computer-aided instruction. When the tutors were asked to fill out forms giving information about their students, they were hesitant to do so and wanted to know the purpose of collecting the information.

Support Strategies. Informational strategies revealed that transportation and child care are barriers to persistence for students in Greensboro. The idea of providing free bus passes may not be a solution to transportation problems, because the bus routes and schedules themselves are inadequate. The program is considering providing child care for the children of members of the learner advisory group, but not for all students; the establishment of a family literacy program might be a way to provide child care for the remaining students. In February 2000, the program started experimenting with benchmark prizes and incentives for students who persist in their studies.

Programmatic Strategies. The two programs in Greensboro have set specific goals for student persistence: 75 percent of students now attending the programs will do so for at least a year, and 60 percent of the students in these programs will increase their participation to over six hours per week. Higher levels of persistence will be supported through a variety of strategies, including student-created Web sites, newsletters, presentations, and other materials to be used in instruction. A learner advisory committee will meet quarterly to discuss community literacy issues such as recruitment: Experienced students will begin mentoring new students. A new learner-orientation session will focus on identifying barriers to persistence and building support networks. The programs will begin offering a televised video series as an alternative form of instruction. A newsletter that reports events, identifies useful Web sites, and shares insights with both tutors and students was first printed in June 2000.

Another programmatic strategy is to more fully integrate the efforts of tutors and AmeriCorps volunteers. A List Serve that will facilitate communications among tutors, AmeriCorps volunteers, and staff was started in January 2000. AmeriCorps volunteers will receive more training so that they can provide better support to students and tutors.

Other programmatic changes to increase persistence will involve new administrative policies to ensure that students take an active role in the literacy program and that the program is addressing the students' specific barriers to persistence. The program's intake forms will be redesigned to provide more information that will allow tutors to serve each student's individual needs and will look more closely at student progress and the impact of the program on students' lives and literacy practices. The GED program at the Chavis branch will be expanded, and student progress will be closely monitored. The 12-week limit on the welfare-to-work program at the Chavis branch will be dropped, and a follow-up support class focused on the transition from welfare to work will be offered.

Operational Strategies. The Greensboro literacy program's operational strategies focus on providing greater access and more space. The library is considering reopening an unused building to function as a community-based literacy library that also would give students and tutors access to computer-aided instruction. In addition, both the Glenwood and the Chavis branches will extend their operating hours. More computer lab hours will be available at the Glenwood branch. The Chavis branch will display a banner advertising classes; a recent change in bus routes near Chavis might give potential students easier access to the library, and the banner will alert them to available services. Finally, the hours of the GED classes at Chavis will be extended to 3:30 PM.

C. A Student's Story

Marta, a 21-year-old Ecuadorian woman, immigrated to Greensboro in 1997 to be with her 29-year-old American husband, who is an engineer. They met in Ecuador, in the factory where Marta worked. She has a ninth-grade education, and her goal is to earn a GED certificate in order to find employment as a daycare worker.

Marta is frustrated and feels trapped by her very limited English abilities, which cause her to be isolated in her home and dependent on her husband. She has been lonely and unhappy at home, with only her 7-month-old baby and the television for company. She watches the History Channel, the Discovery Channel, and Spanish television shows. Her husband wants her to use an educational software program, but working at the computer increases her sense of isolation and boredom. She says: *"I needed work. He said no. It is very boring. My head is hurt. Me duele."* She also misses her family in Ecuador: *"I need my family, mother, father. Tengo mucho depression. No peudo ir a Ecuador." [I am depressed. I can't go to Ecuador.]*[59] Marta is awaiting a visa so she can visit her family.

Marta is willing to put her baby in daycare, but her husband feels that she should stay home for two years to care for the baby. Her isolation is exacerbated by her limited ability to speak English. She is afraid to pick up the telephone when it rings because she finds it so difficult to speak English. She is also afraid to go shopping because she doesn't know how to ask questions in English, especially about how much change she should receive. Marta first came to the literacy program in 1999 but left when she started to feel sick from her pregnancy. She returned to the program a few months ago. She really wants to be in a class so that she can meet other students and have the opportunity to speak English more often. She does enjoy reading with her tutor, Belinda, and she enjoys learning English grammar and writing, which she focused on with her former tutor, Susan. The learning coordinator at the library is working with Marta to expand her studies and reassess her needs.

Marta is close to and can be assertive with Belinda, a middle-aged Greensboro resident. She considers Belinda a friend, and the two of them engage in lively discussions. Belinda also knows Marta's husband, and he calls Belinda when Marta threatens to go to work. Belinda doesn't know whose side she should take in this situation.

Inconsistent participation is common among adult literacy students in library-based programs as they struggle with multiple demands on their time and energy — a spouse, children, work, and so on. Like many students, however, Marta persists because she feels that the program can help her to achieve her goals. Her dream is to speak English more and to find work, but she feels caught in a cycle of limitations because she has few opportunities to do either. Sometimes she feels defeated: *"Puedo si yo no trabajo, no aprendo, no hablo. No tengo con quien hablar." [If I don't work, I can't learn, I can't speak. I have no one to talk to.]*

III. Redwood City Public Library

Project READ is housed in a small space on the second floor of the Redwood City Public Library. The library itself is in a beautiful building, a renovated fire station. Project READ's literacy program is well integrated into the library's overall services, and it receives financial support through the library's general fund. The California State Library provides matching funds for resources contributed by individuals, businesses, and foundations. The program serves Redwood City and adjacent unincorporated parts of San Mateo County, California. Over 15,000 adults who do not have a high school diploma or a GED live in this geographic area, which is also home to a wealthy community that includes well-paid employees of high-tech industries and some of the most expensive housing in the country.

Project READ provides services to approximately 200 adults, about three-quarters of whom are Hispanic. Most students live in an unincorporated section of the county that has few municipal services. This area is home to many immigrants from Latin America who clean houses, do gardening, serve food, work in small businesses, and clean the nearby offices of high-tech companies. Project READ also serves learners who are local business owners, professionals, and city employees. Its literacy students meet with tutors at various convenient areas throughout the library. Most tutoring pairs meet in the late afternoon or evening, although some chose to meet in the morning or on weekends. Most pairs meet at the library, but some choose to meet at various locations in the community, including churches, business offices, bookstores, coffee shops, and school sites. In addition, about 30 percent of the pairs meet in the student's home rather than the library or other community sites. During the course of training, tutors become familiar with many of the materials available from Project READ. In addition, program coordinators work closely with the student-tutor pairs to select materials that are interesting, relevant, and appropriate for the student's reading level and literacy goals. Students and tutors are encouraged to browse the shelves of Project READ and the library to select material for themselves. Small-group instruction, led by AmeriCorps members and tutors, is also offered in four nearby schools in the afternoon or evening.

---

[59] The researcher who interviewed Marta does not speak Spanish well and requested that Marta use very simple language (in other interviews, an interpreter was used); this probably accounts for Marta's limited choice of words.

When students first contact the program, they are given a simple intake interview and are asked whether they would like to fill out the first part of the intake form, writing down their name, address, and phone number. A staff member sits down with the potential student to gather additional information. Student progress is assessed every six months with the Bader Reading and Language Inventory,[60] as well as informally by staff and tutors. The program promotes communication among tutors, staff, and students to ensure coordination of the services that support student progress.

Over 180 volunteer tutors teach in the program, and many of them work in the computer industry that surrounds Redwood City. Their one-on-one tutoring fills a gap left by the school district and community college literacy programs, which offer only traditional classroom instruction. The program has a long waiting list, and new tutors are always needed. In addition to one-on-one tutoring, Project READ provides small-group instruction to adults at local school sites, including instruction on how to use computers. Tutors and students are welcome to use the computer lab, and students may use the lab without their tutors. Software programs are educational, and many are interactive.

Project READ usually has about five computers available and plans to add more when additional space permits it. The lab offers 40 software programs, including innovative software for students with learning disabilities. Signs around the computers designate them for Project READ students only, since other library patrons would like to use them, especially at busy times. The computers are not used as much as the staff would like, in part because tutors and students prefer human interaction. Students use the computers to learn typing, to search the Internet, and to practice literacy skills.

At Project READ, staff, students, and tutors work together to plan the future direction of the program and to develop the services it provides to the community. Staff communicate regularly about their instruction and the progress of the students. This process of reflection has led to the development of an innovative training program for tutors who teach adults with learning disabilities.

For students who have dyslexia, the program is pilot-testing a volunteer-based instructional system developed by Susan Barton, a local educational consultant. The system uses a set of manuals that outline specific structured exercises, and it requires weeks of tutor training. A tutor-coordinator who specializes in identifying learning disabilities assists in early assessment and refers some students to a learning specialist who can direct and guide their tutors. Students are providing positive reports about their progress under this new system. For example, Bill and Dorothy are a student-tutor pair who have been using the system for several months. Bill has noticed an improvement in his ability to attack new words and calmly figure out how to pronounce them, whereas before he was often frustrated. Dorothy feels that the system has helped Bill but acknowledges that it takes a great deal of work for a tutor to learn to use it.

---

[60] For details, see http://vig.prenhall.com.

In the center room at Project READ, a large picture of a grandmother sitting on a park bench and knitting epitomizes the program's intergenerational approach to reading. Project READ serves several different-aged members of many families in the program. In this family-centered atmosphere, students and tutors sometimes become involved in each other's lives; in one case, this has led to marriage.

Project READ reaches outside the library to serve not only adults but also children in the community. It currently has three literacy programs for children and their families. The Families In Partnership Program (FIPP) matches volunteer tutors with first- through ninth-grade students. Like the adult program, FIPP is student-centered, and the children may choose to focus on their homework or personal interest-related material. Tutors act as mentors for both students and parents. They encourage parents to contact their child's teacher, and they mentor parents during conferences and other school meetings. Tutoring sessions are one-on-one and meet twice weekly.

The Kids In Partnership Program (KIPP) pairs academically at-risk teen tutors with schoolchildren at an elementary school that serves one of the lowest socioeconomic areas in Redwood City — approximately 96 percent of the children qualify for the free lunch program for children living below the national poverty level. AmeriCorps members and Project READ staff train and support the at-risk teen tutors in methods to improve the reading, writing, and English skills of the children. They also mentor and tutor the teens to improve their reading skills. Under the guidance of the AmeriCorps members and the Project READ staff, the teen tutors have positive role models, gain self-esteem, and learn through teaching.

Project READ's third community program for families takes place in the evening; at the same school site, small groups of parents are tutored in one classroom, while their children attend KIDS Club in another classroom. The children take part in preschool activities such as crafts, learn games, listen to stories, and are given books to build their personal library. Older children receive help with their homework and are encouraged to participate in the crafts and activities. This intergenerational approach builds everyone's self-esteem, provides the teens and children with positive role models, and improves the entire family's literacy skills.

A nonprofit group, the Redwood City Friends of Literacy, raises funds to provide learners in all Project READ programs with eye exams, reading glasses, hearing tests, learning assessments, and other such assistance. Project READ also delivers adult literacy services in a local prison.

A. Strengths and Challenges

The strengths of Project READ include its holistic approach, which treats students as active participants in the process of instruction and often involves family members of both students and tutors. Project READ staff members know a lot about each student from interviews and assessments as well as from informal observations. This knowledge allows staff to adjust instruction and provide help in other ways to meet students' personal needs. Attention to personal needs is an important component of Project READ's approach. Most tutors make every effort to accommodate the needs of students, including tutoring them in their homes and giving them rides to the library. The staff, students, and tutors communicate regularly about instruction and how to improve it; this process has truly made them "learning partners."

The main challenge facing Project READ is its long waiting list, and staff are responding by intensifying their recruitment of new tutors. Although tutor turnover is not high, any loss of tutors lengthens of the waiting time for new students; and when a tutor does leave, current students are given priority over new students, which also lengthens the wait. The volatile nature of employment in the high-tech industry and the high cost of living in the area contribute to tutor turnover. A tutor who moves to a new job sometimes must end relationships with students, and the expense of living in the area makes it difficult for staff and tutors to stay there. AmeriCorps volunteers fill some staff positions, but they serve only for a year or two and then leave. Space is another challenge for Project READ, since its adult program competes for space with other library departments, particularly in the busy after-school period.

B. Strategies to Increase Persistence

Informational Strategies. Planning to increase student persistence has been supported both by informal communication among staff, students, and tutors and by formal activities such as surveys, phone interviews, and focus groups. The information gathered in these communications has been discussed at staff meetings. It was found that students enjoy the personal attention provided at Project READ but feel that their children need more homework help and that they themselves need instruction in business English.

Support Strategies. Project READ will offer a variety of services to support students in overcoming barriers to persistence. To help parents, preschool activities for young children will be offered in the library to provide child care while adult students use the computers or meet with their tutors. Child care is already integrated into other aspects of Project READ through KIDS Club at the school sites that offer adult small-group instruction. Family events are offered through monthly "story hours." Additionally, referrals will be provided to adults who need help with their children's homework. The program will collaborate with other social service agencies and a local community college to provide access to services and to further education. The staff will also be more diligent in making monthly phone calls to students to encourage their persistence and monitor their progress.

Programmatic and Operational Strategies. Project READ will implement better data collection and management as a tool to serve both students and tutors. Student exit interviews will help staff and tutors to understand why students leave the program, the goals achieved, and suggestions for program improvement. Student intake forms are continuously being revised to capture new challenges that may impede student persistence. The data collected by the program will be analyzed to focus on achievement and student persistence as well as on the involvement of children or spouses in support of student persistence. Project READ staff currently struggle with their data management system, but they have been working with LiteracyPro Systems to ease the inputting and retrieval of information.

Project READ will also strengthen its training of volunteer tutors and increase the program's accessibility to students. Tutor training will be more hands-on, and staff who lead the training will ask tutors to encourage student use of the computer lab, including the Internet and E-mail. The program will institute the recommendations of the Special Needs Advisory Group for teaching students with learning disabilities and will integrate the recommendations into training sessions as well as post them on the Project READ Web site. Office hours will be expanded to make staff more accessible to students during the evening.

C. A Student's Story

Malis is a 39-year-old Cambodian woman who lived in refugee camps in Thailand until 1982, when she immigrated to San Francisco and attended night school in the Tenderloin district for six months with her sister. However, when her sister found a job and could no longer attend class, Malis also stopped going to school. She didn't feel safe walking to class alone because it was *"bad at night — can't walk out so I didn't go to school that much."* She was able to resume studying when she later moved to Redwood City with her husband and two young children. Finding time to study is difficult though, because she works all day and most of the evening at her family's donut shop.

It was at the donut shop that Malis met her tutor, Helen, a woman in her sixties, who recently moved to the area from Southern California. Helen and her husband visited the shop daily, and one day she asked whether Malis wanted to learn to read. She started tutoring Malis and introduced her to the Dr. Suess books. Later, Helen contacted Project READ to get instructional materials, staff support, and advice on teaching methods. Helen decided to attend tutor training, and she brought Malis with her for an interview and reading assessment by Project READ staff so that they could recommend materials. Helen also received the information about Malis's reading level and interests. The two women live near each other, and they meet for tutoring at Helen's house; Helen's husband routinely walks Malis home. The women also exercise together in the morning, and their husbands sometimes help one another with household repairs. Malis previously attended the local adult school but felt that the homework was difficult, and she had trouble with the class schedule because she works until 8 PM. She appreciates Helen's flexibility and the friendship that has developed between them.

Malis and Helen have been working together for just under a year. During tutoring sessions, they work on crossword puzzles, study vowels, and read stories. Malis feels that her reading has improved, and she often surprises herself when she can read notes that her son brings home from school. Sometimes she practices reading at work, using newspapers that people leave behind. Her spoken English has also improved, but she still struggles to understand speech, especially when people ask her questions.

Helen is both a teacher and a friend, and Malis worries that her tutor will *"quit on me"* someday, despite Helen's constant reassurances. The two women have developed a strong bond. Malis's sons and husband are proud of her achievements but rarely support her study by helping with household duties. After tutoring sessions, Malis usually spends time cooking and cleaning for her family. She doesn't ask her husband for help around the house because, like her, he has to work so hard at the donut shop. Both parents are making sacrifices for their children's education, and although her own education is important to Malis, it is also something that can be put on the back burner. She describes her challenges to persistence in this way: *"It's hard because you have to work a lot . . . you got to do what you got to do. You cannot do too much."*

IV. Queens Borough Public Library

The Queens Borough Public Library is among the nation's oldest and largest library systems and serves one of the most ethnically diverse populations in the country. The adult literacy program, which was founded in 1977, has its roots in earlier library-based programs that provided education to immigrants. Today's immigrants represent 170 ethnic groups and speak 120 languages, and the library system now includes the central library and 62 branches. Six branches support Adult Learning Centers (ALCs), which are funded through the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative (NYCALI), other government programs, and foundations.

The six ALCs enroll more than 2,000 adults each year and supply resources and referrals for thousands more. They offer ESOL, pre-GED, and basic literacy instruction by volunteer tutors as well as a variety of resources for adult students; tutors also provide small-group instruction. Each ALC offers computer classes and supports self-study through audiotapes and videotapes. All the centers have literacy collections, and the books can be checked out by students. The library also publishes student writing in a journal entitled *The Open Door*.

Twenty staff and more than 100 volunteer tutors support ESOL and literacy instruction in small groups at the learning centers. Each ALC has a manager whose professional background is in adult literacy. Other staff include education specialists who provide instructional advice and training to the volunteer tutors. The library publishes *Tutor Talk*, a newsletter in which tutors can raise questions and express their concerns to education specialists, who then respond. The library also recently published new tutor-training guides in The Queens Kaleidoscope Series, each of which focuses on a specific theme, such as using library resources more effectively. Volunteer tutors get a chance to meet each other at an annual conferences.

The six ACLs are dispersed throughout the borough of Queens, and many students can walk to the nearest center; others arrive by bus and subway. The centers are open from morning to evening for 40 to 50 hours a week. The LILAA persistence study focuses on the ALCs located in the Central branch, which serves mostly ABE students; the Flushing branch, serving mostly ESOL students; and the Rochdale Village branch, serving only ABE students.

The *Central* branch's ALC serves about 300 adult students in the bustling Jamaica section of Queens. Students attend an orientation and are then tested; when an appropriate opening occurs, they are placed in a group. The ALC is in a storefront building across the street from the main library. This small, carpeted building has a large open room, where students work, as well as rooms at the back of the building for conversation classes and the computer lab, which offers Internet access on its six computers. The main library across the street has more computers with Internet connections, and the library provides technological assistance to the ALC.

Small-group instruction takes place around tables spread throughout the ALC, and there is a constant flow of movement from one room to the next. Tutors frequently use a photocopy machine located in the main room to create curricular materials. Staff members sit in an open area near the entrance of the building and are available to students and potential students at all times of the day.

The ALC in the Central branch has many self-study materials, including audiotapes, and its books are shelved under such categories as "wonder," "discover, " "the working world," and "family life." The collection also includes two cramped shelves of well-used books about the heritage of African-American and other black students.

The *Flushing* branch is the Queens Borough Public Library's largest. Its program enrolls approximately 500 students per year in ESOL and literacy study and is located in a commercial district populated by immigrants from all over the world. The program serves many more drop-in clients who are seeking referrals or resources. The ALC is on a lower level of the building; there is a reception desk at the entrance, and behind that is a large room used for self-study of materials in the ALC. Staff offices and the tutoring rooms are located behind the main room.

The ALC's largest room has many tables that are surrounded by books and other materials used by students and tutors. Beside this room is another, smaller classroom with round tables and many books on freestanding display racks. Staff plan to divide the smaller room to accommodate more ESOL instruction. Books in the smaller room include paperback fiction books, which some students prefer because they can be read easily on the subway.

At the back of the ALC, the computer lab has 17 computers and is staffed by paid, well-trained instructors. Rosetta Stone and English Discoveries are the software programs most frequently used by students. There is limited use of the Internet, even though all the computers provide access. The computer lab also has a bulletin board that refers students to other adult education classes in the neighborhood. Many ESOL students don't work in small groups but instead work with staff to develop a personal program of self-study based on computerized instruction and listening materials.

The majority of the students at Flushing's ALC are immigrants from Asian and Latin American countries. Students come for facilitated conversation classes, which are conducted in the large tutoring room, and to use the computer lab and self-study materials. Most students want to improve their English speaking and literacy skills and to study for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which is required for entrance into postsecondary education and training programs.

The *Rochdale Village* branch houses a small program that serves about 100 students in a predominantly African-American neighborhood. The students are mainly African-American and Afro-Caribbean. This is a middle-class and working-class community of brick apartment complexes, and the Thurgood Marshall School for gifted children is located here. The library is accessible by bus, but many students live near enough to walk to the program.

The small ALC is housed in one room at the back of the library. It is crowded with a large collection of literacy materials, five computers, and eight tables for small-group instruction. Blackboards, globes, flipcharts, and collages line the limited wall-space. Though the level of instruction in this program is intense, administrative procedures are fairly informal. The students are assessed with standardized instruments and are tracked through diverse methods.

A. Strengths and Challenges

The Queens Borough Public Library's adult literacy and ESOL services are accessible and beneficial to students for many reasons. Potential students can easily walk into the ALCs to inquire about services. When they are ready to join the program and begin learning, a systematic process guides them through orientation, assessment, and assignment to a group. Easy entry and reentry procedures, flexible scheduling, diverse course offerings, extended hours, and six locations in the community support access to services. Most ALCs are open on weekdays until 8 PM and all day on Saturdays. Small-group instruction, rather than one-on-one tutoring, provides opportunities for discussion and cooperative learning, and the group format also allows the program to serve many students. The large size of the program encompasses a diversity of teaching methods and accommodates a diversity of learning styles among its students. Most tutors are from the neighborhood where the ALC is located and, therefore, are aware of community events and issues. Tutors receive substantial preservice training and the ongoing support of full-time staff. The staff members of the six ALCs communicate with each other and help one another, which fosters the development of common procedures.

The large size of the program also presents challenges. The ALCs are open long hours, and the unusually large number of students makes it difficult for staff to provide as much attention as everyone might want. Students are asked in the orientation to make a commitment to participate, to be assertive in requesting information, and to suggest changes in curricula and instruction, but some students may require more support to persist in the program. Many students do not have portfolios of their work on file; staff members have little time to make phone calls to students, and some students do not feel strongly connected to the program.

B. Strategies to Increase Persistence

Informational Strategies. The ALCs of the Queens Borough Public Library brought in consultants to run staff workshops on how to conduct focus groups and interviews. Since September 2000, individual staff members and Program Manager Bruce Carmel have been conducting focus groups. Carmel reported that the focus groups allowed him to see the program from the students' point of view and that he would like the focus groups to be integrated into ALC operations. In his view, students' social service needs, such as counseling, are best met through a referral system. He noted that, between November 1999 and September 2000, staff perceptions of student persistence moved from being an alien concept to a concept that they integrate into their work. The focus at this program has been on improving the quality of instruction, to give students and tutors a clear sense of their goals and ways that they can work together, step-by-step, to achieve them.

Staff experiences at the persistence conferences, in November 1999 and March 2000 — supported by the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds and the research on persistence conducted by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) — have been introduced into the ALC staff meetings and workshops. In addition, a consultant has been engaged to conduct case studies of students in the program who have high levels of persistence. The consultant is in the analysis phase of research, but the findings will be reviewed and may have an impact on future persistence strategies implemented by the ALCs.

Support Strategies. A persistence coordinator was hired to conduct focus groups and analyze the data from them, which led the program to make changes in both the environment of ALCs and the instruction within them. Increased importance was placed on goal-setting to help students track their own progress.

Student associates to be hired by the Central and the Rochdale Village ALCs will call other students to maintain their link with the program and will act as liaisons between students and staff. Other support strategies that are in the planning phase include student counseling that will focus on academic preparation and time management. During both orientation and instruction, students will be helped to develop personal daily study plans.

Programmatic and Operational Strategies. New student assessment and instructional tools will be added to the program services. ESOL tutors, who in the past have focused primarily on grammar and conversation, will be trained in how to teach oral language acquisition. A new in-service tutor training model that emphasizes hands-on learning will be added in increments, so that tutors will not be overwhelmed by information in their initial training sessions. The training will focus on new strategies to teach reading, including the language experience approach. This restructuring of tutor training will develop a system that includes preservice sessions that last for a few weeks, an in-service program after tutors begin working with students, and ongoing technical assistance from staff.

Student goal-setting will be organized around goal sheets, benchmark forms, and a midyear tutor-student conference that reviews the goals. This effort will emphasize the development of goals that can be reached within the year. Students will be encouraged to develop new goals when their former ones have been reviewed or achieved. The focus of the annual tutor luncheon will be broadened to include a celebration of student achievement.

These three ALCs will implement a variety of other strategies to increase support for student persistence. At the Central program, intake and orientation will be more systematic and will focus on helping new students take charge of their learning. Students in the more advanced tutoring groups will be encouraged to informally help students in the less advanced groups. The Flushing program will implement more ESOL conversation groups, reduce the number of hours (from 12 to 5) that students need in computer instruction before entering an ESOL class, and encourage interactions among students to reduce feelings of isolation. The Rochdale Village program will engage tutors more in running the ALC and will create a system in which students and tutors work together in revolving, multilevel groups. Outreach will be expanded by means of welcome cards, booths at malls, and visits to preschools. Students will be encouraged to join an established writing group, math group, or book club.

To be more accessible to students, the ALCs will extend their hours of computer-assisted instruction, and additional staff will be hired. The Central branch will move its ALC to a new space in 2001, and the Flushing branch will divide its classrooms to accommodate more ESOL instruction.

C. A Student's Story

Mary is a 52-year-old Liberian woman who came to the United States in 1987 and has recently applied for citizenship. She is separated from her husband, who is still in Liberia, and now lives with her son in a small apartment that rents for more than $600 a month. She works as a home health aid and recently discovered that her job benefits had decreased. She wants to get a second job, or possibly a better job, but explains, *"They won't look at you if you can't read."*

Mary has been attending the Central ALC for two years, and her goals are to get a GED certificate and to learn how to "*do things for myself — especially in the line of education, everything that is important in my life.*" The patient she was caring for died recently, and so she has no morning work, which allows her to attend a pre-GED class for three hours twice a week. She is worried, though, that her employer will call her to work on another case that will conflict with her class schedule; she feels that she must accept whatever assignment the health agency gives her — or risk losing her job.

Mary discovered the program at Central through a professional referral when she left a community college program. Her reading is improving at the ALC, but she wishes that she could spend more time in class, because six hours a week are not sufficient to achieve her goals quickly. She likes this program because she can take the books home to study. She persists in the effort to improve her reading abilities so that she can find a better job, realize her educational dreams, and *"do something higher"* for herself. She persists even when she doesn't feel like attending class, because she doesn't want the work to pile up and she doesn't want to leave the program and then have to return. As Mary puts it: "*When I leave, I leave — so that's why I'm still sticking around — to see whatever I can. You know, give me a little bit more than what I have now to put together.*"

V. Oakland Public Library

Since 1984, Second Start has served as the adult literacy program of the Oakland Public Library. Funded by the City of Oakland through the library budget and by other public and private sources, Second Start was first housed in the library, then moved to an office building in the downtown area, and in July 2000 moved to its current location on the second floor of a privately owned building near its previous site. Second Start shares this new location with the Women's Economic Agenda Project — the building's owner and a community service organization that provides training to low-income single mothers. The search for a new facility and moving into it were very disruptive to the program's operations, staff, and students.

Second Start is a small, community-based alternative school with an energetic environment. The program encourages students to develop friendships and support one another. Curricula and instruction, as well as staff-student relations, are focused on students' needs. Classroom instruction is linked to one-on-one tutoring. An informal lunchroom provides food donated by neighborhood restaurants and fosters a feeling of community. The oral histories of students, published in the Oakland Readers Series, and the student writing displayed on banners throughout the facility are vehicles for students' self-expression

Second Start opens at 10 AM, and through the LILAA initiative, service hours have been extended; the program now stays open until 8 PM three nights per week. The morning is the busiest time, because many students take care of their children and grandchildren in the afternoon. Transportation is a challenge for some students, but bus tickets are provided to those who need assistance.

Almost 50 percent of Oakland's population are African-American, as are about 85 percent of Second Start students. Many of the students are single parents who are struggling with competing demands on their time. Some of the students were referred to Second Start by other programs that found it difficult to serve adults who have very low literacy skills and/or severe learning disabilities. At Second Start, such students receive intensive and personalized attention in a community atmosphere. The multiethnic staff and nearly 150 volunteer tutors work with more than 300 students on basic literacy skills.

Second Start offers one-on-one tutoring, computer-assisted instruction, and classroom instruction in math, pre-GED skills, writing, and spelling. In addition to these more traditional adult education classes, Second Start has offered stress reduction, art, and yoga classes. Twice a month, the program sponsors a family literacy night. Students participate in the program's multicultural thematic literary events, which include going to plays and hearing local authors and poets. Second Start's large collection of reading materials includes student writing.

A professional instructor teaches each of the classes. Some classes have a fixed schedule, but others are open-entry, open-exit, with students joining at different times. Instructors employ a variety of teaching methods. In the math classes, students use plastic chips to practice multiplication, and the spelling and writing classes often focus on the lives of the students. The self-awareness class helps students explore their feelings, talk about their past, and learn to cope with life's demands. The students in the art classes sell greeting cards that they design, and they have published a book of their artwork, *From Scratch: Making Art, Making Literacy*. The family literacy program operates twice a month, on Wednesday evenings; parents and other family members attend, along with their children. Parents suggest the topics for these literacy-based family nights, which have centered on nutrition, manners, violence prevention, how to start a business, and creating family histories.

The computer-assisted literacy program is well attended by the students, who enjoy socializing with and helping one another while they work on the software programs. One of the most popular software programs requires the students to fill in the blanks on a copy of the Oakland Readers Series, a published collection of the oral histories of many Second Start students. As of September 2000, the program had twenty computers and, with funding from an IBM grant, was planning to add eight more computers plus scanners and other equipment in order to participate in a software development project. Exploring and using the Internet are also popular educational activities.

Nearly everyone is accepted as a student at Second Start.[61] This openness results in a diverse student body that includes people who may have been turned away by other programs, such as those with physical or developmental disabilities or mental health problems. Some students are homeless, and some have major health problems. Second Start staff are encouraging and responsive, and the program offers leadership opportunities for students as well as chances for them to learn and practice self-direction. Several students have been hired as staff, and the program has been increasing efforts to share decisionmaking and power with students. Many adults turn to Second Start because of its accepting community atmosphere; along with providing education, the program offers students assistance in accessing other public services.

Many students' first contact with Second Start is made through a phone call. Prospective students are told about the program, and an appointment is made for them to come into the office and begin the intake process. They are greeted at the door by the receptionist, a student who has been hired by the program. During their initial intake interview, students are assessed for reading and writing skills by means of an extensive test developed by Second Start. Prospective students who are deemed eligible for the program (those who read below the fifth-grade level) put their names on a waiting list and are encouraged to use the computers, audit one of the classes, or attend family literacy night while they wait to be assigned a tutor, which typically takes three to six weeks. In this way, all students can start learning the day they arrive at Second Start.

Tutors go through several stages of training for a total of 16 hours. The training emphasizes cultural aspects of tutoring, letting go of stereotypes, student-driven goal-setting, and realistic expectations about literacy progress. Students and staff describe the program to the prospective tutors and give them a realistic perspective on the obstacles to student persistence. Tutors are expected to fill out monthly progress sheets, which is sometimes difficult because not all students demonstrate measurable progress each month. For this reason, Second Start is developing a shorter report form that will be more useful. Some tutors who meet with students off-site feel isolated from the program, and a newsletter is provided to decrease their sense of isolation.

A. Strengths and Challenges

The strengths of Second Start include its participatory approach to instruction and program management. Students are encouraged to develop themselves personally and professionally by speaking their mind, challenging authority, and expressing their needs — in meetings with staff, in a student newsletter, with their tutors, and in class sessions. The program teaches students to be successful and confident in a formal educational setting: the classroom. The program addresses many of the noneducational needs of its participants by providing referrals to social service agencies, and staff members help students with the paperwork required to access services. After students have established a pattern of regular participation, they are given bus tickets to get to the program. Students also hold staff positions and assist other students.

The challenges for the program include monitoring student progress, evaluating tutors, and recording program information. The time invested in developing the new Greensboro Oakland Adult Literacy System (GOALS) database has been more intensive than staff anticipated. To monitor student progress, staff rely on monthly tutor reports, quarterly class progress reports, observation, student self-assessment, milestone charts, and the semiannual CALPEP (California Adult Literacy Progress Evaluation Process). In late 2000, the program began to use the new GOALS database to systematically record these measures of progress. However, the tutor reports of student progress are subjective, and often tutors don't send reports to Second Start. In order to collect more regular and more reliable information on student progress, the staff instituted a semiannual student assessment in May 2000. Trained staff performed the first assessment of more than 70 students, and a second round was scheduled for November 2000.

---

[61] The exception is ESOL students; historically, California has restricted library literacy programs to native or proficient English speakers, although that is now changing.

Another major challenge for Second Start was the July 2000 move to new space and the loss of two valued staff members. Both events caused disruption. The loss of these staff members made it difficult to offer many classes and took a toll on the staff who had to fill in the gaps.

B. Strategies to Increase Persistence

Informational Strategies. Second Start hired a part-time staff member to gather information on how to improve student persistence. Focus groups, surveys of tutors and students, tutor-student conferences, staff meetings, and class sessions have all been used as sources of information for planning. In 1999, self-assessment reports were mailed to students. These reports contained simple yes/no questions that inquired about the classes and computers, and students could circle and check boxes rather than fill in blanks. Help was offered in filling out these reports, and 46 out of 150 reports were returned. Some students indicated that the Laubach books used by Second Start did not help them; and since few had computers at home, they were confused about navigating through the lessons in the software programs and needed more help. Many students reported that their sense of control over their lives had increased because of participation in Second Start, but they indicated that they had made little progress in reading and writing. Surveys were also sent to tutors, who reported that they needed more training, especially for teaching students with learning disabilities. They, too, were discouraged by the slow progress of their students.

Focus groups with both tutors and students were held in 2000 as a follow-up to the surveys. The tutors requested a mentoring program, events to bring tutors together, support groups, field trips, a refresher course, and a Web site. They complained that the monthly reporting form was too extensive and should be dropped or completed less often. The tutors reported that they continued their work because they valued their involvement in the lives of the students. Student focus groups emphasized the popularity of the classes. Students who were still in the program guessed that other students had left it because their tutor left or because the work was too difficult. The focus groups and surveys showed that students would like regular assessments. None of these groups voiced the need for child care.

Support Strategies. Second Start is considering testing a number of strategies to support student persistence. Providing child care — which would include educational activities for children — for students who were in classes and tutoring was proposed but not implemented because it would be expensive and a possible liability for the library. Also, as just mentioned, focus groups and surveys did not indicate a high demand for child care among current students. The family literacy night has been one way to offer child care, and this activity has proved popular; parents are pleased with the learning opportunities it provides their children. A program to have students call people who are on the waiting list was proposed and is under consideration. Second Start has begun to improve the intake process, so that it will set students on a stronger initial course, and this may improve student persistence later. Transportation subsidies will continue for students at Second Start, and a satellite program in another section of Oakland will serve students who can't travel the 45 minutes by bus to the downtown location.

Programmatic and Operational Strategies. In 2000, Second Start hired a persistence coordinator to collect quantitative participation data and a part-time researcher to collect qualitative data and oversee persistence efforts. Second Start staff will be host to the staff of the Queens Borough and New York Public Libraries and exchange strategies to improve persistence. The program will implement strategies to increase student involvement in operations and to increase the amount of information available to both students and tutors. More classes will be provided to accommodate students' multiple literacy levels. Orientations designed and led by students will occur on a variable basis. Seven issues of a student newspaper edited by a student on staff were distributed to students and tutors as of September 2000. A student List Serve was started in mid-2000. Tutor training is also being adjusted to accommodate tutors' requests for support and community. Training is now more participatory and includes a dialogue between prospective tutors and current students. Student assessments will be conducted more regularly — semiannually, at least.

Second Start will also implement specific strategies to improve both computer instruction and family literacy night. Additional computer-assisted learning will be provided through a collaborative effort with IBM that will develop and pilot computer-based curricula. In addition, a Web site for Second Start will be used for instructional purposes. Family literacy night will be expanded to include new topics of interest to students.

C. A Student's Story

Ron is a 52-year-old public bus driver who was born and raised in the Bay Area. He has a history of difficulties with reading but a history as well of support from his family in coping with those difficulties. When he had trouble with school as a child, his mother asked that he be held back, found him a tutor, and prodded his older sister to keep tabs on him. When he was repeating the same class over and over in community college, he was referred to a learning specialist, who diagnosed a learning disability. Finally, at the prompting of his wife, Ron discovered Second Start over 10 years ago. When he first began his study, he found his tutor, Diana, too rigid; he says that she *"laid down the law."* When he told her that he didn't have time to complete his homework, she was upset. Flexibile instruction and scheduling are important for Ron, and, over time, Diana has lightened her approach. They currently work at her office during breaks, on the steps of the library, in a bookstore, and at Second Start when Ron can get there.

Diana helps Ron overcome literacy problems at work by using cue cards that focus on his tasks. He has learned to read books for the first time, and he wrote his first letter to his wife. He is now able to read billboards on his bus route. He confessed that *"there were times that I thought about quitting cause I was going through a lot,"* especially when the homework became overwhelming. But he said that Diana would talk about his feelings with him, and she would encourage him to show up whether or not he had finished the homework. When Diana and Ron find it is difficult to work together, they take a break. He says, *"Then things would happen, lighten up, like damn, this is what me and Diana study and then I'd want more . . . therefore, I want back in to try and get some more."* He feels a strong longtime relationship to Second Start but would like to go back to community college. As he puts it, he is *"looking for a link . . . looking for something else so I can make the move. Not just leave and I think that I'll always use Second Start anyway, even if I was going someplace else. I'd run back through here, call Diana, or what have you."*

Chapter 6

Summary and Conclusions

The preceding chapters have introduced and illuminated the important role that public libraries play in providing adult literacy services. Libraries are open, neighborhood institutions that are well positioned to provide literacy services to a wide range of students with a wide range of needs and constraints. Libraries have access to many key resources needed to serve adults who are learning to read — including tutors, books, computers, and space. Libraries are usually within easy reach of their patrons, and they are often open during hours when other adult schools are closed. This makes library literacy programs a convenient alternative for working people who want to improve their literacy skills. Because of libraries' mission to serve the entire community, they can also be the most appropriate provider of literacy instruction for people who have either very low skills or learning disabilities that cannot be addressed by traditional adult education providers.

I. The Issue of Student Persistence

Improving student persistence is a major challenge facing adult education providers in general. Learning to read and write is a lengthy process, especially for students who have very low skills when they enter a program. If they drop out of the program prematurely, or if they spend only a few hours a month working on their literacy skills, they are unlikely to achieve their goals. Consequently, literacy programs that serve such students will find it difficult to document how effective they are, even if students clearly appreciate the program experience and their interactions with tutors and staff.

Library literacy programs have to address unique barriers to student persistence that may not be prevalent in other adult education programs. As mentioned, library programs often serve students who are employed and, therefore, unable to participate for many hours a week. They also serve students with learning disabilities, for whom learning to read and write can be a difficult and drawn-out process. Also, because of libraries' funding structures and privacy policies, and the fact that much of the instruction is provided in a decentralized way by volunteer tutors, library literacy programs usually do not have well-developed data systems to record and analyze students' participation and progress.

On the other hand, library literacy programs may have an easier time motivating their students to persist than other adult education providers. Libraries not only provide literacy instruction but also offer a larger infrastructure featuring many additional services for students and their families, including a community that fosters independent learning. Thus, students who might disengage from a traditional program might be motivated to stay in a library program because of other library services, such as children's programs, assistance in accessing social services, and help with forms and tax matters. Also, the personal relationships that develop easily among students and between students and volunteer tutors can help students persist.

II. The Opportunities and Challenges of Studying Persistence

The five libraries in the LILAA persistence study are beginning to address the issue of student persistence through a wide variety of initiatives, activities, and services. Often in close cooperation and consultation with their students, library staff are drafting comprehensive strategies to improve persistence. Most such strategies are in the early stages of development, and ultimately some may not be implemented. However, there will be enough change over the next two and a half years to ensure many opportunities to examine the implementation and effects of new persistence strategies. Next, the implementation of changes will reveal a great deal about how staff carry out their plans, whether students respond to the changes by increasing their persistence, and whether the student response translates into greater goal attainment and achievement.

This report on the LILAA persistence study concludes by posing three primary challenges:

- In order to carry out this ambitious initiative, program staff must develop specific approaches to improving student persistence, must find ways to implement these approaches, and must improve the monitoring of individual students' participation and progress.
- The students, tutors, and teachers are expected to respond to this initiative with longer participation, increased learning effort and intensity, and stronger emphasis on student goals.
- Lastly, the researchers face the challenges of capturing and describing changes in program operations, student participation, goal attainment, and student achievement; of analyzing such changes and understanding persistence from the perspective of the students; and of formulating policy lessons that extend beyond the five programs in this study.

Appendix

The Libraries in the Larger LILAA Project

In 1999, Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds (WRDF) awarded three-year extensions of its 1996 grants to 15 libraries to continue to strengthen their adult literacy programs. The programs discussed in the body of the report are participating in the LILAA persistence study. This appendix briefly describes the other 10 library literacy programs that received WRDF grants to implement persistence strategies through August 2002. These programs are not part of the persistence study, and the descriptions are based on their reports to WRDF.

The 10 libraries are located in six states: California, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, and Massachusetts.[1] Like the programs in the study, these 10 library literacy programs are implementing a variety of strategies with the intention of increasing student persistence. All the sites will use informational strategies to uncover and better meet the needs of students, tutors, and staff. These informational strategies involve focus groups, quantitative data collection, assessments of student progress, student advisory committees, and campaigns to assess the literacy needs of the entire community. Half the sites' strategies include a focus on increasing the level or quality of technology used as a learning tool. Two sites' strategies focus specifically on increasing outreach in rural areas. Other strategies include community service referrals, providing transportation and child care, expanding the area served by the program, improving literacy curricula, and tracking student goals.

California

The Reading Program

The Reading Program provides literacy services for adults in Santa Clara County in northern California. The program is unique in that it is the product of collaboration between two library jurisdictions: the Santa Clara County Library System, a network of nine community libraries; and the single-site Mountain View Community Library. The Reading Program works closely with other county departments to reach hard-to-serve adults in jails and in work furlough and recovery programs. The program has an aggressive outreach campaign in the county's rural areas and provides instruction at migrant farmhouses and agricultural plants. In addition to family literacy programs, offered at multiple sites, a new medical center literacy program will open in 2001 at the Santa Clara County Valley Medical Center, located in San José.

The Reading Program's literacy instruction is provided by volunteer tutors and offers a variety of learning options, including computer instruction, multimedia storytelling, family literacy, creative writing, and a very rewarding student-led leadership institute known as the Henry Huffman Leadership Institute.

The Reading Program's strategic focus for 2001 is accountability. Strategies for meeting this goal include student identification of their own needs and staff and volunteer development aimed at helping students attain coping and problem-solving skills that address their needs. Besides the strategies to support persistence among students and tutors, a comprehensive marketing plan is being developed to provide more opportunities for corporations and individuals to join the Reading Program's efforts to increase the literacy skills of adults in Santa Clara County.

---

[1] California, Florida, Illinois, and Massachusetts each have two programs.

San José Public Library

Partners in Reading provides basic literacy instruction to English-speaking adults in the 18 branches of the San José Public Library. The library system is located in San José, the third-largest city in California. The literacy program offers one-on-one tutoring by a trained volunteer and computer-aided instruction for adults who read or write at or below the eighth-grade level. Partners in Reading helps students acquire skills that will enable them to function more effectively on the job, in the community, and as a library patron. The Families for Literacy component of the program provides family reading activities to which students can bring their preschool-age children, instruction for the parents on how to read to their children, and free books for participating families.

Partners in Reading is implementing a variety of strategies to increase student persistence. A major focus of the WRDF grant project is to expand instructional technology resources and to facilitate access to technology and increase its use in instruction. To extend the instruction that takes place in tutoring sessions, the program is piloting the use of WebTV and laptop computers in students' homes. Another persistence strategy is to improve the quality of tutoring through observation of tutoring sessions, followed by feedback to tutors and students. The program also hopes to improve the quality of tutoring by delivering in-service instruction in innovative ways that result in increased participation. Other persistence strategies include improving goal-setting and measurement processes and recognizing achievements so that students will better understand their progress; referring students who have vision or hearing difficulties to health care providers that offer low-cost screening; and increasing outreach efforts in order to recruit balanced numbers of new students and tutors and to raise community awareness of the need for literacy improvement.

Florida

Jacksonville Public Library

The Center for Adult Learning (CAL) is located in the Jacksonville Public Library in Jacksonville, Florida. CAL offers reading, spelling, and basic math instruction to adult students who read below the eighth-grade level, although most of the students are functioning below the fifth-grade level.

CAL has implemented several strategies with the aim of serving more people and increasing student persistence: adopting new curricula, increasing the use of volunteer tutors, expanding its service area, upgrading technology, improving assessment methods, and increasing student involvement.

The 13-station computer lab at the main library has been upgraded with new computers, software, and work stations; each computer is on-line. A second, seven-station computer lab for adult students has been opened on the city's northside. Paid staff and volunteer tutors assist students in the lab. Additionally, 20 volunteers have been trained to provide phonics-based and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction to small groups of students at the main library and five branches. A family literacy outreach program targets parents and children in Jacksonville's most economically disadvantaged communities. Parents participating in these activities are also encouraged to take advantage of adult literacy services at the library, and they receive a free children's book after visiting the main library or one of the 14 branches.

LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library

Literacy Volunteers of Leon County (LVLC) is sponsored by and located in the LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library. LVLC provides adult literacy services to citizens of Leon County, which has a population of 241,500; its major city is Tallahassee. The program offers literacy services and ESOL tutoring for adults at library branches, in GED and ABE classrooms, and in correctional facilities. The organization also offers family literacy services at the B. L. Perry branch library.

LVLC is using its WRDF grant to implement a variety of strategies, which include technology-assisted tutoring, small-group instruction for ESOL students, and improving the program's collection of print and audiovisual materials. The program uses a LiteracyPro database to monitor progress toward increasing student persistence by tracking student attendance and learning gains.

Illinois

Robinson Public Library District

The Robinson Public Library District provides basic education, literacy, and ESOL instruction for adults in Crawford and Lawrence Counties, which are located in the rural, southern region of Illinois. The combined population of the two counties is 38,371. Given the library's location, it has a strong interest in providing a rural perspective on issues raised while promoting literacy in libraries. The library's literacy program offers one-on-one tutoring and other literacy services for adult students age 16 or older.

The Robinson Public Library District's literacy program is using the 1999 WRDF grant to gather information about the factors that influence student retention and persistence and is developing and implementing strategies to address those factors. The program plans to improve the intake process, provide transportation and child care, initiate student support groups, and improve student assessment.

Waukegan Public Library

The Lake County Literacy Program in Waukegan, Illinois, is a coalition of the Waukegan Public Library, the College of Lake County, and the Literacy Volunteers of Lake County, Inc. In addition to providing literacy, ABE, ESOL, and pre-GED services for adult students, the program offers family and workforce literacy instruction. A consultant who specializes in learning disabilities is available to students as well.

The Lake County Literacy Program is focusing its efforts under the 1999 WRDF grant on three main areas. The program is conducting surveys and focus groups to determine which strategies best support student involvement and persistence. The library hopes to increase student persistence by fostering self-directed learning through orientations, student-led workshops, and peer mentoring and tutoring. The program is also improving its instructional methodologies by (1) broadening its goal-setting process through the use of the Equipped for the Future (EFF) framework, which includes "Home and Family," "Self," "Work," and "Community"; and (2) developing phonemic awareness through the use of research-based instruction.

Kentucky

Lexington Public Library and Operation Read, Inc.

Operation Read serves adult literacy and ESL students throughout the Lexington Fayette Urban County Government area. With a population of 260,000, employment in this region is primarily in white-collar, service, or agricultural work.

Working with Operation Read, the Lexington Public Library reaches out to adults who read below the sixth-grade level, as well as to adults entering the community who need help with understanding, speaking, reading, and writing English. Students may participate in one-on-one tutoring, family literacy programs, small-group instruction, worksite programs, and computer instruction.

In support of the idea that ownership increases commitment, Operation Read is designing and implementing strategies to engage the program's major stakeholders — students and volunteers — in every level of operations. Initial implementation strategies included increasing access to technology, developing an orientation for new students and increasing support for all learners, and providing continuous training for volunteer tutors. To ensure ongoing tutor support and training, the program has initiated a journeyman process for newly trained ESL tutors, whereby they are mentored by more experienced tutors before being assigned their own group of students. Operation Read is moving from being learner-centered to learner-driven.

Lousiana

New Orleans Public Library

The New Orleans Public Library's Learning Center offers adult students literacy instruction, GED preparation, and preemployment training. The program aims to increase students' self-esteem by improving their reading, writing, and problem-solving skills and teaching them to apply these skills in the workplace and in their personal lives. The Learning Center is attractive to adult students because of its nonthreatening environment, its self-paced learning system, and its open-entry, open-exit program structure.

The Learning Center is implementing three major persistence strategies with its WRDF grant. The first strategy involves moving the Learning Center into the main library, where the atmosphere and resources will better support adult learning. The second strategy focuses on program improvements, including increasing the number of paid instructors on staff and improving the initial assessment of students at intake. The third strategy is to provide transportation stipends to both students and volunteer tutors.

Massachusetts

Plymouth Public Library

The Literacy Program of Greater Plymouth (LPGP) serves adult students from Plymouth and surrounding towns. Between 1990 and 2000, the population of Plymouth increased to 51,701 — an increase of 13.4 percent. LPGP provides one-on-one tutoring to ESOL and ABE students as well as classroom instruction to ABE students. The program's continuum of educational services ranges from beginning reading to GED attainment, and a specialist in learning disabilities is available to students and tutors.

To increase both student and tutor persistence, LPGP is focusing on combining the use of its new Technology Learning Center (TLC) with individual tutoring. In their initial training, tutors are introduced to methods of using the Internet, educational software, and audiotapes as part of the learning process, and a technology coordinator at the TLC continues this training and assists both tutors and students. LPGP is also increasing the support and training of tutors and students and has introduced features to recognize student achievement.

Springfield City Library

Springfield Library's Read/Write/Now (R/W/N) program serves adults whose literacy skills range from beginning to GED-level, in the greater Springfield area. With a population of about 152,000, Springfield is the largest city in western Massachusetts. R/W/N serves more than 120 adult students annually, in day and evening classes facilitated by professional teachers who are supported by volunteer tutors. Publication of student stories and curricula driven by students' goals are strong components of this literacy program. R/W/N also offers family and health literacy programs, as well as opportunities for students to develop into tutors and leaders.

In several aspects of the program, R/W/N is implementing strategies to increase student persistence. Many adult literacy students face barriers to persistence because of problems that can be addressed by other community organizations, to which the program makes referrals. R/W/N also aims to increase persistence by promoting student involvement in all program matters, including curriculum development. Efforts are also under way to strengthen the program's relationship with other library services. R/W/N is using its 1999 WRDF grant to offer an evening GED class and to provide consistent and appropriate computer instruction to students.

References

American Library Association. 1964. *Service to Adult Illiterates.* Chicago: American Library Association, Adult Services Division, Committee on Reading Improvement for Adults.

American Library Association. 1998. "Retooling Literacy for the 21st Century." *American Libraries*, vol. 29 (11).

Appalachian Adult Education Center. 1973. *The Interrelating of Library Basic Education Services to Disadvantaged Adults: A Demonstration of Four Alternative Working Models.* Annual Report, vols. 1-12. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Bandura, A.1986. *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Beder, H. 1990. "Reasons for Nonparticipation in Adult Basic Education." *Adult Education Quarterly* 40: 207-218.

Beder, H. 1991. *Adult Literacy: Issues for Policy and Practice.* Malabar, FL: Krieger.

Beder, H. 1992. "Nonparticipation in Adult Education." *NCAL Connections* (Winter). Philadelphia: National Center on Adult Literacy.

Bickerton, R., J. Comings, K. Shields, and S. Waldron. 1995. *A Research Agenda for Adult Basic Education: Report of a Delphi Study.* Boston: World Education.

Birge, L. E. 1981. *Serving Adult Learners.* Chicago: American Library Association.

Bos, J. M., J. Snipes, S. Scrivener, and G. Hamilton. Forthcoming, 2001. *Improving Basic Skills: The Effects of Adult Education in Welfare-to-Work Programs.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Brandt, D. 1998. "Sponsors of Literacy." *College Composition and Communication* 49 (2): 165-185.

Brown, E. 1975. *Library Services to the Disadvantaged.* Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.

Bundy, M., and F. Stielow (eds.). 1987. *Activism in American Librarianship, 1962-1973.* See Major Owens, "The War on Poverty and Community Outreach," Chap. 6, pp. 73-82. New York: Greenwood.

Burtless, G. 1994. "Rising Wage Inequality and the Future of Work in America." Pages 7-40 in J. Norwood (ed.), *Widening Earnings Inequality: Why and Why Now.* Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press.

Center for Applied Linguistics. 1998. *Research Agenda for Adult ESL.* Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Coleman, J. E. 1983. "The Social Responsibilities of Librarians Toward Literacy Education." In P. Schuman (ed.), *Social Responsibilities of Librarians.* New York: Bowker.

Comings, J. 1995. "Literacy Skill Retention in Adult Students in Developing Countries." *International Journal of Educational Development* 15 (1): 37-45.

Comings, J. T., and S. Cuban. 2000. *So I Made Up My Mind: Introducing a Study of Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs.* New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation.

Comings, J., A. Parrella, and L. Soricone. 1999. *Persistence Among Adult Basic Education Students in Pre-GED Classes.* NCSALL Reports 12. Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

Comings, J., A. Sum, and J. Uvin. 2000. *New Skills for a New Economy: Adult Education's Key Role in Sustaining Economic Growth and Expanding Opportunity.* Boston: MassInc.

Cross, K. 1981. *Adults as Learners: Increasing Participation and Facilitating Learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cuban, S. 1999. "Before Days: Women in a Library Literacy Program in Hilo, Hawaii Talk Story." Ph.D. Dissertation. Madison: University of Wisconsin.

Darkenwald, G. 1986. *Adult Literacy Education: A Review of the Research and Priorities for Future Inquiry.* New York: Literacy Assistance Center.

Estabrook, L., and E. Lakner. 2000. *Literacy Programs for Adults in Public Libraries: A Survey Report Prepared for the LWRD* [Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Foundation]. Champaign: University of Illinois, Library Research Center, Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

Eyster, G. 1976. *Non-Formal Training Institutes: Final Report, 1973-1976.* Morehead, KY: Morehead State University, Appalachian Adult Education Center.

Hayes, E. 1988. "A Typology of Low-Literate Adults Based on Perceptions of Deterrents to Participation in Adult Basic Education." *Adult Education Quarterly* 39: 1-10.

Hiatt. P. 1965. "Urban Public Library Services for Adults of Low Education." *Library Quarterly* 12 (1, 2): 81-98.

Kirsch, I., A. Jungeblut, L. Jenkins, and A. Kolstad. 1993. *Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Results of the National Adult Literacy Survey.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Knowles, M. 1970. *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy.* New York: Association Press.

Lee, R. E. 1966. *Continuing Education for Adults Through the American Public Library, 1833-1964.* Chicago: American Library Association.

Levy, F., and R. J. Murnane. 1992. "U.S. Earnings Levels and Earnings Inequality: A Review of Recent Trends and Proposed Explanations." *Journal of Economic Literature* 30 (3): 1333-1381.

Lewin, K. 1999. *The Complete Social Scientist: A Kurt Lewin Reader,* ed. Martin Gold. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Lindzey, G., and E. Aronson. 1985. *Handbook of Social Psychology*, vol. I. New York: Random House.

Lipsman, C. K. 1972. *The Disadvantaged and Library Effectiveness.* Chicago: American Library Association.

Lyman, H. 1973. *Library Materials in Service to the New Adult Reader.* Chicago: American Library Association.

Lyman, H. 1977a. *Literacy and the Nation's Libraries.* Chicago: American Library Association.

Lyman, H. 1977b. *Reading and the Adult New Reader.* Chicago: American Library Association.

McCook, K. P. 1992. "Where Would We Be Without Them? Libraries and Adult Education Activities, 1966-1991." *Reference and User Services Quarterly* [previously published as *RQ* by the American Library Association] 2: 245-253.

McDonald, B. 1966. *Literacy Activities in Public Libraries: A Report of the Study of Services to Adults.* Chicago: American Library Association.

Mincer, J. 1974. *Schooling, Experience, and Earnings.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Monroe, M. 1986. "The Evolution of Literacy Programs in the Context of Library Adult Education." *Library Trends* (Fall): 197-205.

Murnane, R., and F. Levy. 1996. *Teaching the New Basic Skills.* New York: Free Press.

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). 1997. *Digest of Education Statistics.* NCES 98-015. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

National Institute for Literacy (NIFL). 2000. *Equipped for the Future Content Standards.* Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.

National Institute for Literacy (NIFL). 2001. *A National Research and Development Agenda for Adult Learning and Literacy.* Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy.

Nauratil, M. 1985. *Public Libraries and Non-Traditional Clienteles: The Politics of Special Services.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Perin, D., and D. Greenberg. 1993. "Relationship Between Literacy Gains and Length of Stay in a Basic Education Program for Health Care Workers." *Adult Basic Education* 3 (3): 171-186.

Polachek, S., and S. W. Siebert. 1993. *The Economics of Earnings.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Quigley, B. 1997. *Rethinking Literacy Education: The Critical Need for Practice-Based Change.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Rolstad, G. 1990. "Literacy Services in Public Libraries." Pages 245-263 in K. Heim and D. Wallace (eds.), *Adult Services: An Enduring Focus for Public Libraries.* Chicago: American Library Association.

Schmidt, S. 1978. "A History of ABE Services in Public Libraries." In "The Public Library and Adult Basic Education," ed. Melissa Forinash. *Drexel Library Quarterly,* vol. 14 (4).

Seager, A. 1993. *Learning from Public Library Literacy Programs.* Portsmouth, NH: RMC Corporation.

Seidman, I. E. 1991. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and Social Sciences.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Shirk, J. C. 1983. "Relevance Attributed to Urban Public Libraries by Adult Learners: A Gase Study and Content Analysis of 81 Interviews. Ph.D. Dissertation. College Station: Texas A&M University.

Spangenberg, G. 1996. *Even Anchors Need Lifelines: Public Libraries in Adult Literacy.* New York: Spangenberg Learning Resources and the Center for the Book.

Spradley, J. P. 1979. *The Ethnographic Interview.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Spradley, J. P. 1980. *Participant Observation.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Sticht, T. 1982. *Evaluation of the Reading Potential Concept for Marginally Illiterate Adults.* Alexandria, VA: Human Resources Research Organization.

Sticht, T., B. McDonald, and P. Erickson. 1998. *Passports to Paradise: The Struggle to Teach and to Learn on the Margin of Adult Education.* San Diego: Consortium for Workforce Education and Lifelong Learning (CWELL).

Strauss, A., and J. Corbin. 1990. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Sum, A., R. Taggart, and N. Fogg. 1995. *Dreams to Dust: The Deteriorating Labor Market Fortunes of Young Adult Men and Women in the United States, 1967-1994.* Boston: Northeastern University, Center for Labor Market Studies.

Tracy-Mumford, F. 1994. *Student Retention: Creating Student Success.* NAEPDC Monograph 2. Washington, DC: National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium, Inc. (NAEPDC).

Tyler, J., R. Murnane, and J. Willett. 2000. *Cognitive Skills Matter in the Labor Market, Even for School Dropouts.* NCSALL Reports 15. Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

Vann, S. K. 1978. *Melvil Dewey: His Enduring Presence in Librarianship.* Littleton, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.

Weibel, K. 1982. *Outreach Programs in Libraries, 1960-1975.* Madison: University of Wisconsin.

Weingand, D. E. (ed.). 1986. "Adult Education, Literacy and Libraries." Champaign: University of Illinois, Graduate School of Library and Information Science. *Library Trends*, vol. 35 (2).

Wikelund, K., S. Reder, and S. Hart-Landsberg. 1992. *Expanding Theories of Adult Literacy Participation: A Literature Review.* NCAL Technical Report TR92-1. Philadelphia: National Center on Adult Literacy.

Young, M., H. Fleischman, N. Fitzgerald, and M. Morgan. 1994a. *National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs: Learner Outcomes and Program Results.* Arlington, VA: Development Associates.

Young, M., H. Fleischman, N. Fitzgerald, and S. Morgan. 1994b. *National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs: Patterns and Predictors of Client Attendance.* Arlington, VA: Development Associates.

Zweizig, D., J. Robbins, and D. Johnson. 1988. *Libraries and Literacy Education: Comprehensive Survey Report.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Recent Publications on MDRC Projects

Note: For works not published by MDRC, the publisher's name is shown in parentheses. With a few exceptions, this list includes reports published by MDRC since 1999. A complete publications list is available from MDRC and on its Web site (www.mdrc.org), from which copies of MDRC's publications can also be downloaded.

Education Reform

Project GRAD

This evaluation examines Project GRAD, an education initiative targeted at urban schools and combining a number of proven or promising reforms.

Building the Foundation for Improved Student Performance: The Pre-Curricular Phase of Project GRAD Newark. 2000. Sandra Ham, Fred Doolittle, Glee Ivory Holton.

Career Academies

The largest and most comprehensive evaluation of a school-to-work initiative, this study examines a promising approach to high school restructuring and the school-to-work transition.

Career Academies: Early Implementation Lessons from a 10-Site Evaluation. 1996. James Kemple, JoAnn Leah Rock.

Career Academies: Communities of Support for Students and Teachers — Emerging Findings from a 10-Site Evaluation. 1997. James Kemple.

Career Academies: Building Career Awareness and Work-Based Learning Activities Through Employer Partnerships. 1999. James Kemple, Susan Poglinco, Jason Snipes.

School-to-Work Project

A study of innovative programs that help students make the transition from school to work or careers.

Home-Grown Lessons: Innovative Programs Linking School and Work (Jossey-Bass Publishers). 1995. Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp, Joshua Haimson.

Home-Grown Progress: The Evolution of Innovative School-to-Work Programs. 1997. Rachel Pedraza, Edward Pauly, Hilary Kopp.

Project Transition

A demonstration program that tested a combination of school-based strategies to facilitate students' transition from middle school to high school.

Project Transition: Testing an Intervention to Help High School Freshmen Succeed. 1999. Janet Quint, Cynthia Miller, Jennifer Pastor, Rachel Cytron.

Equity 2000

Equity 2000 is a nationwide initiative sponsored by the College Board to improve low-income students' access to college. The MDRC paper examines the implementation of Equity 2000 in Milwaukee Public Schools.

Getting to the Right Algebra: The Equity 2000 Initiative in Milwaukee Public Schools. 1999. Sandra Ham, Erica Walker.

Education for Adults and Families

LILAA Initiative

This study of the Literacy in Libraries Across America (LILAA) initiative explores the efforts of five adult literacy programs in public libraries to improve learner persistence.

So I Made Up My Mind: Introducing a Study of Adult Learner Persistence in Library Literacy Programs. 2000. John T. Comings, Sondra Cuban.

Toyota Families in Schools

A discussion of the factors that determine whether an impact analysis of a social program is feasible and warranted, using an evaluation of a new family literacy initiative as a case study.

An Evaluability Assessment of the Toyota Families in Schools Program. 2001. Janet Quint.

Opening Doors to Earning Credentials

An exploration of strategies for increasing low-wage workers' access to and completion of community college programs.

Opening Doors: Expanding Educational Opportunities for Low-Income Workers. 2001. Susan Golonka, Lisa Matus-Grossman.

Effects of Welfare and Antipoverty Programs on Children

Next Generation Project

A collaboration among researchers at MDRC and several other leading research institutions focused on studying the effects of welfare, antipoverty, and employment policies on children and families.

How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Children: A Synthesis of Research. 2001. Pamela Morris, Aletha Huston, Greg Duncan, Danielle Crosby, Johannes Bos.

How Welfare and Work Policies Affect Employment and Income: A Synthesis of Research. 2001. Dan Bloom, Charles Michalopoulos.

Minnesota Family Investment Program

An evaluation of Minnesota's pilot welfare reform initiative, which aims to encourage work, alleviate poverty, and reduce welfare dependence.

Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program. Volume 2: Effects on Children. 2000. Lisa Gennetian, Cynthia Miller.

Reforming Welfare and Rewarding Work: A Summary of the Final Report on the Minnesota Family Investment Program. 2000. Virginia Knox, Cynthia Miller, Lisa Gennetian.

Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project

A test of the effectiveness of a temporary earnings supplement on the employment and welfare receipt of public assistance recipients.

The Self-Sufficiency Project at 36 Months: Effects on Children of a Program That Increased Parental Employment and Income (Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, Ottawa, Canada). 2000. Pamela Morris, Charles Michalopoulos.

National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies

Conceived and sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), with support from the U.S. Department of Education (ED), this is the largest-scale evaluation ever conducted of different strategies for moving people from welfare to employment.

Do Mandatory Welfare-to-Work Programs Affect the Well-Being of Children? A Synthesis of Child Research Conducted as Part of the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (HHS/ED). 2000. Gayle Hamilton.

Teen Parents on Welfare

Teenage Parent Programs: A Synthesis of the Long-Term Effects of the New Chance Demonstration, Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, and the Teenage Parent Demonstration (TPD). 1998. Robert Granger, Rachel Cytron.

Ohio's LEAP Program

An evaluation of Ohio's Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP) Program, which uses financial incentives to encourage teenage parents on welfare to stay in or return to school.

LEAP: Final Report on Ohio's Welfare Initiative to Improve School Attendance Among Teenage Parents. 1997. Johannes Bos, Veronica Fellerath.

New Chance Demonstration

A test of a comprehensive program of services that seeks to improve the economic status and general well-being of a group of highly disadvantaged young women and their children.

New Chance: Final Report on a Comprehensive Program for Young Mothers in Poverty and Their Children. 1997. Janet Quint, Johannes Bos, Denise Polit.

Parenting Behavior in a Sample of Young Mothers in Poverty: Results of the New Chance Observational Study. 1998. Martha Zaslow, Carolyn Eldred, editors.

MDRC Working Papers on Research Methodology

A new series of papers that explore alternative methods of examining the implementation and impacts of programs and policies.

Building a Convincing Test of a Public Housing Employment Program Using Non-Experimental Methods: Planning for the Jobs-Plus Demonstration. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Estimating Program Impacts on Student Achievement Using "Short" Interrupted Time Series. 1999. Howard Bloom.

Using Cluster Random Assignment to Measure Program Impacts: Statistical Implications for the Evaluation of Education Programs. 1999. Howard Bloom, Johannes Bos, Suk-Won Lee.

Measuring the Impacts of Whole School Reforms: Methodological Lessons from an Evaluation of Accelerated Schools. 2001. Howard Bloom.

The Politics of Random Assignment: Implementing Studies and Impacting Policy. 2000. Judith Gueron.

Modeling the Performance of Welfare-to-Work Programs: The Effects of Program Management and Services, Economic Environment, and Client Characteristics. 2001. Howard Bloom, Carolyn Hill, James Riccio.

A Regression-Based Strategy for Defining Subgroups in a Social Experiment. 2001. James Kemple, Jason Snipes.

About MDRC

The Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. We are dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through our research and the active communication of our findings, we seek to enhance the effectiveness of social policies and programs. MDRC was founded in 1974 and is located in New York City and San Francisco.

MDRC's current projects focus on welfare and economic security, education, and employment and community initiatives. Complementing our evaluations of a wide range of welfare reforms are new studies of supports for the working poor and emerging analyses of how programs affect children's development and their families' well-being. In the field of education, we are testing reforms aimed at improving the performance of public schools, especially in urban areas. Finally, our community projects are using innovative approaches to increase employment in low-income neighborhoods.

Our projects are a mix of demonstrations — field tests of promising program models — and evaluations of government and community initiatives, and we employ a wide range of methods to determine a program's effects, including large-scale studies, surveys, case studies, and ethnographies of individuals and families. We share the findings and lessons from our work — including best practices for program operators — with a broad audience within the policy and practitioner community, as well as the general public and the media.

Over the past quarter century, MDRC has worked in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada. We conduct our projects in partnership with state and local governments, the federal government, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.

MDRC

16 East 34th Street
New York, NY 10016
(212) 532-3200

www.mdrc.org

475 14th Street
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 663-6372

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

ERIC®

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

☒ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☐ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").

EFF-089 (3/2000)